



THE  
CLASS-LEADER'S MANUAL:

BEING

LETTERS

ADDRESSED TO A CLASS-LEADER,

ON ALL MATTERS RELATING TO HIS OFFICE.

BY

HENRY FISH, M.A.

THE great multiplication of virtues upon human nature resteth  
upon societies well ordained and disciplined.—LORD BACON.

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of heaven and its glory, and of hell and its misery!—and think of these things till your heart burns within you. You have active services to perform, and self-denying duties to discharge, and therefore you ought to have zeal as a living principle, powerful and vigorous, dwelling continually within you. O get it and keep it! Let the love of Christ constrain you, and move and actuate all your powers. Let your mind think, and tongue speak, and hands act, and feet run, to promote his glory. Present yourself as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. You will need all the zeal you can command to prevent you from growing cold and formal and dead.

Your piety ought to be *cheerful piety*. It is your province to recommend religion,—to recommend it to those who are “without,” as well as to those who, as new converts, may be induced to unite with you. Now, as the religion of Christ is the most pleasurable thing in the world, as the essence of it is an ever-flowing source of happiness, let it, in your mien and aspect, ever look forth as the morning. By your habitual cheerfulness, put to flight that utterly false and foolish notion that

some of your members are so situated that you cannot have access to them, or you may be so circumstanced that you cannot always attend to this part of your duty yourself; but if it be so, you may do it by proxy. It is most probable that there are some faithful, spiritually-minded, zealous persons, both male and female, in your class, who would gladly help you in this department of service. If it be necessary, do not neglect to avail yourself of their assistance. In the general, however, if you were so determined,—and you ought to be,—you might see the absent members in person. There is much truth in the old adage, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” In many instances where Leaders neglect their absentees, we fear the will is wanting. To my certain knowledge, there are many Leaders who never go after their absent members; or if they do, it is very, very seldom. If their members come to class, well; and if they do not, there is no concern manifested. I have known several instances of members having been absent from class for a quarter of a year in succession; and when the minister at the quarterly visitation has asked the reason of this, the Leader has not been able to give



allow me to digress a little, and to offer a few remarks on the general question. They may occasionally serve to guide and direct you. There is as yet much practical infidelity in the churches of God, as it respects Christian beneficence. It is not confined to rich or poor. It exists among all classes ; and there are some such glaring exemplifications of it, that I cannot but conclude, that in these cases there is either much ignorance or much unbelief connected with them. I am free to admit, that there is no body of men in Christendom which, as a whole, gives so much, in proportion to their means, to charitable and ecclesiastical purposes as the Wesleyan Methodists do ; and yet many of them, in common with other professing Christians, act as if they did not believe many passages of scripture which relate to the disposal of property. True it is they profess to believe every thing contained in the volume of revelation ; but do they act on all occasions as if they so believed, especially as it respects giving ? Take the following passages :—

“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase ; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy

and overcome. None of them are very formidable. They will all give place to faith and patience and perseverance. Never yield to any of them for a moment. However feeble and unfit, however ignorant and unworthy, however unprofitable and useless, you may feel yourself to be ; and however you may be grieved occasionally by the inconsistencies of some of your members, and however you may offend others of them by your faithfulness ; go forward in the way which has been marked out for you, neither turning to the right hand nor the left. Think of the example of Christ, and of many who have been engaged in the same blessed work ! Think of the necessities and the welfare of the church ! Think of the refreshing seasons you have experienced with those who are associated with you in Christian communion, and of the benefit which, you have every reason to suppose, they have received from your services ! Think of the path of usefulness which is open before you, and of the great amount of moral and spiritual good you may yet be the means of conferring ! Think of the reckoning day, and of the promised reward ! And as a Class-Leader, in the Wesleyan-Me-

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THE  
CLASS-LEADER'S MANUAL,  
&c.

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LETTER I.

OF THE OFFICE OF CLASS-LEADER.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—In addressing you respecting the office which you hold, it may be well for me, in the first place, to say something which will serve to illustrate the relative position which you occupy with regard to the Wesleyan-Methodist ministry and churches.

The church of Christ, ever since its formation, has had various orders of office-bearers. The New Testament scriptures and ecclesiastical history abundantly confirm the truth of this statement. In the primitive church there were “some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and



teachers." (Eph. iv. 11.) "God," says the apostle, "hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." (1 Cor. xii. 28.) All these offices were of Divine institution. They seem to have been necessary to the state of things which the gospel dispensation introduced. They were adapted, by Infinite Wisdom, to the exigences of the times in which they were exercised. The whole of them, however, were not intended to be of permanent duration. Some of them were altogether of a supernatural order, and these came to an end with the age of miracles: the gift of prophecy failed, and of tongues ceased, and of knowledge by inspiration vanished away; but others of them were ordinary, and intended to be as durable as the world. These remain, and are exercised among us at this day.

But, in addition to officers of Divine appointment, the church of God has always had officers of human appointment; although such officers have had nothing contrary to holy scripture connected either with their appointment or their duties. The appointment of such officers, whether it be the appointment

of precentors, as among the nonconformists, or of churchwardens, as among episcopalians, may be ranked among positive institutions, or prudential regulations, needful either to the financial or spiritual well-being or to the good order of the churches in which persons so appointed officiate. Such is the nature of the office with which you, as a Leader in the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion, have been invested. It is purely of human institution, although from the beginning it has evidently been stamped with the Divine approbation. The circumstance in which the office originated was, in itself, simple; but the beneficial and glorious results which have followed prove it to have been providential, and therefore of God. It may be interesting to you to know what that circumstance was. I will furnish you with an account of it as it is given by John Wesley. It appears that what were designated "Religious Societies," existed previous to the formation of Methodist Societies, and the appointment of Leaders, of which I shall have occasion to speak hereafter.\* To

\* One of these "societies" met in Baldwin-street, Bristol, previous to the period that Mr. Wesley visited this city. Of this Mr. Durbin, of whom there is some

one of these John Wesley was introduced when he went to Bristol. This was productive of great good, and led ultimately to the erection of a place of worship in Broad Mead, called "The Room," which is now occupied by the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. By the erection of this room, a debt was contracted; and the effort which it was necessary to make to pay this debt led to the formation of classes. In referring to this in his Journal, Feb. 15th, 1742, Mr. Wesley observes, "Many met together to consult on a proper method of discharging the public debt; and it was at length agreed, 1. That every member of the Society should contribute a penny a week; 2. That the whole Society should be divided into little companies or classes, about twelve in each class; and, 3. That one person in each class should receive the contributions of the rest, and bring it in to the stewards weekly."\*

Mr. Wesley, in his "Plain Account of the account in "the Methodist Magazine" for 1799, p. 487, was a member; hence Mr. Durbin often used to say, "I had the honour to receive Mr. Wesley into society; for we were formed into a regular society before he came to Bristol; and he joined with us, and became our teacher."

\* Wesley's Works, vol. i. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 357.

People called Methodists," in describing the difficulties by which he and his coadjutors were beset in the beginning of their career of usefulness, says, " We soon found some who did not love the gospel. I do not know that any hypocrites were crept in ; for indeed there was no temptation. But several grew cold, and gave way to the sins which had long easily beset them. We quickly perceived there were many ill consequences of suffering these to remain among us. It was dangerous to others ; inasmuch as all sin is of an infectious nature. It brought such a scandal on their brethren as exposed them to what was not properly the reproach of Christ. It laid a stumbling-block in the way of others, and caused the truth to be evil spoken of.

" We groaned under these inconveniences long before a remedy could be found.

" At length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the society in Bristol concerning the means of paying the debts there, when one stood up and said, ' Let every member of the society give a penny a week till all are paid.' Another

answered, 'But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it.' 'Then,' said he, 'put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they can give any thing, well. I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting.' It was done. In a while some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long. I called together *all the Leaders of the classes*, (so we used to term them and their companies,) and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence."\*

In his "Thoughts upon Methodism," Mr. Wesley gives a more particular account of this occurrence: his words are, "When a large number of people was joined, the great diffi-

\* Wesley's Works, vol. viij. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 252.

culty was to keep them together; for they were continually scattering hither and thither, and we knew no way to help it. But God provided for this also, when we thought not of it. A year or two after, Mr. Wesley met the chief of the society in Bristol, and inquired, 'How shall we pay the debt on the preaching-house?' Captain Foy (Honour to Captain Foy!) stood up and said, 'Let every one in the society give a penny a week, and it will easily be done.' 'But many of them,' said one, 'have not a penny to give.' 'True,' said the captain; 'then put ten or twelve of them to me. Let each of these give what they can weekly, and I will supply what is wanting.' Many others made the same offer. So Mr. Wesley *divided the societies* among them; assigning a class of about twelve persons to each of these, who were termed Leaders.

"Not long after, one of these informed Mr. Wesley that, calling on such an one in his house, he found him quarrelling with his wife. Another was found in drink. It immediately struck into Mr. Wesley's mind, This is the very thing we wanted. The Leaders are the persons who may not only receive the contributions, but also watch over

the souls, of their brethren. The society in London,\* being informed of this, willingly followed the example of that in Bristol; as did every society from that time, whether in Europe or America. By this means it was easily found if any grew weary or faint, and help was speedily administered. And if any walked disorderly, they were quickly discovered, and either amended or dismissed.”†

Here you have a detailed account of the circumstance in which the office you sustain had its origin. It had its origin in an association which had for its object the payment of a debt contracted by building a place of worship.

\* In his Journal, Thur., March 25th, 1742, Mr. Wesley observes, “I appointed several earnest and sensible men to meet me, to whom I showed the great difficulty I had long found of knowing the people who desired to be under my care. After much discourse, they all agreed there could be no better way to come to a sure, thorough knowledge of each person than to divide them into classes, like those at Bristol, under the inspection of those in whom I could most confide. This was the origin of our classes at London, for which I can never sufficiently praise God; the unspeakable usefulness of the institution having ever since been more and more manifest.” (Wesley's Works, vol. i. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 364.)

† Wesley's Works, vol. xiii. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 226.



When the members of the societies were, in the first instance, divided into classes, and a person was appointed to each class, to collect the pence for the purpose before specified, there seems to have been no design that such person should have a sub-pastoral oversight of those of whom he had the charge. This appears to have been an after-thought, although it was just the thing which Mr. Wesley felt was needed.

Thus you see that that which was primarily designed to relieve the infant society of Methodism in Bristol from a pecuniary difficulty, has been made, by the over-ruling providence of God, a source of immense and unspeakable spiritual good through every period of its existence. It has been the means of bringing many devout and valuable men into the active service of the church, who otherwise would probably have been comparatively useless in their generation; of developing, exercising, and improving their latent gifts; of administering nourishment to the graces of hundreds of thousands of holy people; and of conserving "the united societies," which, notwithstanding the manifold changes and fluctuations, both political and ecclesiastical, that have taken



place in the world since they were formed, continue to flourish at this day.

There is one thing, however, which, if you are acquainted with Mr. Wesley's early history, must have struck your mind in reading the foregoing remarks, and which I will notice here; and that is, The office of Leader or Leader of classes, in a religious community, could be nothing new to him. Mr. Wesley had a knowledge of the church government which was exercised among the Moravians. He had visited their establishment at Hernhuth, and observed the practices which obtained there; and the Moravians had both classes and Leaders at Hernhuth. Indeed, as early as 1736, when Mr. Wesley was at Savannah, he says, "We considered in what manner we might be useful to the little flock. And we agreed, 1. To advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society," (no doubt after the manner of the "religious societies" which then existed in London and elsewhere,) "and to meet once or twice a week, in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another. 2. To select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded

partly by our conversing singly with each, and partly by inviting them altogether to our house.”\*

And as it respects Leaders, when Mr. Wesley was at the Moravian establishment at Hernhuth, he copied the following extract from “the Constitutions of the Church of the Moravian Brethren,” and he has embodied it in his Journal: “The church is so divided, that first the husbands, then the wives, &c., are in so many distinct classes. These larger are also (now) divided into ninety small classes or bands, over each of which one presides who is of the greatest experience. All these Leaders meet the senior every week, and lay open to him and to the Lord whatsoever hinders or furthers the work of God in the souls committed to their charge.”† This was written in August, 1738, three or more years previous to the division of the “societies” at Bristol into classes. Mr. Wesley, however, seems to have lost sight of this, or he would easily have discovered how the assistance which he “felt was needed” might be obtained. Perhaps the al-

\* Wesley's Works, vol. i. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 30.

† *Ibid.* p. 144.

together altered circumstances in which he was placed may account for this apparent absence of mind. But this shows that he was then without plan or design in his proceedings, and that his sole object was to benefit the souls of the children of men.

In the foregoing statements, you will see how the honourable office to which you have succeeded originated, and for what purpose it was at first exercised. Your office, it is evident, is a sub-delegated office, involving sub-delegated ministrations. Its primary object, from the time persons were appointed to it and had additional duties imposed upon them, was to assist the regular ministers of the word of God in the pastoral oversight of the flocks committed to their charge. Residing, as they have always done almost from the commencement of Methodism, in the centre of a circuit, round which they have itinerated, being few in number, having to travel from place to place, to preach often, and a never-ending series of other matters to attend to,\* it was utterly im-

\* The duties of Wesleyan ministers are much more onerous now than they were formerly. The early race of Methodist ministers were, for the most part, strangers to travelling on foot from place to place. They knew

practicable for them to give the persons converted to God through their instrumentality, and who were united together in church-fellowship, that close, vigilant, and constant personal superintendence and care, which their moral and spiritual welfare, and the stability and prosperity of the Connexion at large, made necessary. Leaders were intended to help in supplying this lack of service : your labours, then, are to be viewed as an important auxiliary to a gospel ministry. You have to do that which your ministers, in consequence of other engagements, cannot do themselves ; and thus you “help” them “in the gospel.” You are emphatically a “helper together with them.”

I have no occasion to dwell on the manner of your appointment to office ; but I may observe, the manner is wisely ordered, inas-

nothing of the toil of mind which is necessary to minister the word of life to the same congregation six, or eight, or more times, every month. They had no demands made upon their time and energies for the great Mission cause, as ministers now have. Nor had they such a multiplicity of committee-meetings to attend ; nor of week-day and Sunday-schools to take the oversight of. These things are not considered by a certain class of persons who are accustomed to speak without thinking.

much as no one can become a Leader without being nominated by a minister, who, after due inquiry, is satisfied that the person so nominated possesses requisite qualifications for the office ; and without that nomination, in the second place, being confirmed by a majority of the Leaders present at the meeting in which such nomination takes place. Thus the balance of power between ministers and Leaders is nicely preserved. There can be no improper authority or power exercised in this matter but what may be checked. It is also worthy of remark, that Methodism existed for more than half a century before Leaders had any legislative voice in the meetings of which they formed an essential part ; it was the Act of Pacification in 1795 which gave you a kind of co-ordinate power and authority, in what are designated Leaders' meetings.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER II.

OF THAT SPECIES OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNION WHICH MAKES THE OFFICE OF CLASS-LEADER NECESSARY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—It is of great importance you should have right views of this question : for unless you are thoroughly convinced and satisfied that such communion is in accordance with the Divine Will, and calculated to promote the everlasting good of those who cultivate it, you will not enter so heartily into the spirit of your work, as it is, for many reasons, most desirable you should do.

Apart from the abstract consideration of the subject, I may be allowed to observe, that your own experience, and the unanimous testimony of those with whom you have been accustomed to associate, must have furnished you with convincing evidence, that it is a mode of communion which has the sanction of the most high God. You have proved its beneficial effects through every period of your own religious career, and can trace in connexion with

it the growth and improvement of all your gifts and graces ; and hence you ought to be prepared, without any hesitation, to recommend it to the attention of others.

It is true it is a species of Christian communion which is not practised by the churches in general. I have no knowledge of any other church in Christendom where the same thing, in all its parts, is adopted ; although many, both ministers and members of other churches, distinguished for their piety, have admired it, and longed for its introduction among themselves, and, in some instances, have attempted to introduce it.

I wish you, however, to have your mind impressed with the fact, that a Methodist class-meeting is only a modification of that holy communion which has been enjoyed by the saints of God in all ages. Whatever appearance of novelty, in the view of some persons, there may be in the manner of conducting it, there is no novelty in the thing itself. The "communion of saints" is the natural result of the law of association sanctified by the Holy Spirit ; and discovers the sound philosophy embodied in the old adage, "Birds of a feather flock together." It may be received as an axiom, aris-



ing out of the nature and fitness of things, or from the doctrine of affinities, that, among sentient beings, like will associate with like. It is so with the fashionables of the world, with pleasure-takers, with philosophers, with statesmen, with lovers of music, and with men of science ; and it cannot be otherwise with the children of God. And, notwithstanding some divines, as Dr. Mason \* of New-York, have affirmed, that the phrase “communion of saints,” as it is used in the Apostles’ Creed, refers simply to the communion of churches, one church recognising another, and having an open communion of members in the sacrament of the Lord’s supper ; yet, as you well know, there always was, and is, “a communion of saints” of a different and superior order to this, “even,” as Dr. Heylyn says, “that conjunction of affections which is, and ought to be, between them, expressed *in all the outward signs of love and fellowship.*” †

That there was such a communion among the people of God under the olden dispensation, is evident, from the unequivocal testi-

\* See his “Plea for Catholic Communion in the Church of God.” 8vo. 1816, pp. 224—227.

† On the Creed, fol. 1654, p. 412.



mony of the Old-Testament scriptures ; you cannot have read those scriptures with attention without having discovered this. David speaks of "the saints," and "the excellent of the earth, with whom was all his delight;" (Psalm xvi. 3;) and of one with whom he "took sweet counsel," and "walked unto the house of God in company." (Psalm lv. 14.) "Come and hear," says he, "all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul." (Psalm lxvi. 16.) He moreover says, "They," meaning the people of God, "shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power ; to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness." (Psalm cxlv. 11, 12, 7.) And the prophet Malachi is very explicit : he affirms, "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another : and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth

his own son that serveth him." (Mal. iii. 16, 17.)

As to what was the practice of the primitive Christians, the New Testament is as clear as it can be. It leaves no doubt on the subject. The New-Testament scriptures inform us, that the disciples of Christ, at the commencement of the Christian church, were distinguished from the common mass of mankind by a separation from them, and by their visible union in one body, for the purpose of holy intercourse and mutual improvement. They were not of the world, even as the Saviour was not of the world. (John xvii. 14.) "If ye were of the world," said Christ to his disciples, "the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John xv. 19.) Although they were in the world, they were "not of the world." They were a sanctified brotherhood, whom God had set apart for Himself. After the day of Pentecost, we are informed, they continued "in fellowship." (Acts ii. 42.) And they were taught not to neglect the assembling of themselves together; (Heb. x. 25;) to exhort one another daily; (Heb. iii.

13;) to comfort themselves together, and edify one another; (1 Thess. v. 11;) to consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; (Heb. x. 24;) to confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another; (James v. 16;) to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in their hearts to the Lord; (Col. iii. 16;) to warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, and support the weak; (1 Thess. v. 14;) to bear one another's burdens; (Gal. vi. 2;) and to rejoice with those who do rejoice, and weep with those who weep; (Rom. xii. 15;) which duties could not have been performed, without having intercourse one with another, something like that which is practised in a class-meeting.

It is as clear as daylight, then, that that kind of communion which you are appointed to promote, has the express warrant of holy scripture; and that something more than church-communion in the sacrament of the Lord's supper was enjoyed by the primitive Christians. They had "fellowship," as well as "breaking of bread." How, for instance, could they exhort one another daily? how could they comfort and edify one another?

how could they provoke one another to love and good works? how could they confess their faults one to another, and pray for one another? how teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs? how bear one another's burdens? how weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice? if they never met together for the purpose of conversing on experimental religion, and the state of each other's souls? Whatever persons may say to the contrary, those churches, the members of which do not observe, or in which they have not the opportunity of observing, the foregoing precepts which are enjoined in the New-Testament scriptures, are not based on the model of the apostolic churches.

That great and good man, in whom Methodism originated, seems to have had correct views of what was necessary to constitute Christian communion when he instituted class-meetings. In speaking of the fruits of his own and of his brother Charles's labours in many parts of London, he says, "One and another and another came to us, asking what they should do, being distressed on every side, as every one strove to weaken, and none to strengthen, their hands in God. We advised

them, 'Strengthen you one another;' talk together as often as you can; and pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may 'endure to the end and be saved.' Against this advise we presumed there could be no objection, as being grounded on the plainest reason, and on so many scriptures, both of the Old Testament and New, that it would be tedious to recite them. They said, 'But we want you likewise to talk with us often, to direct and quicken us in our way, to give us the advices which you well know we need, and to pray with, as well as for, us.' I asked, 'Which of you desire this? Let me know your names and place of abode.' They did so. But I soon found they were too many for me to talk with severally so often as they wanted it; so I told them, 'If you will all of you come together every Thursday in the evening, I will gladly spend some time with you in prayer, and give you the best advice I can.' Thus arose, without any previous design on either side, what was afterwards called *a society*: a very innocent name, and very common in London,\* for any number of people associating

\* See the note at the end of this Letter, p. 35.

themselves together. The thing in their associating themselves together was obvious to every one. They wanted 'to flee from the wrath to come,' and to assist each other in so doing; they therefore united themselves in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.

"It quickly appeared, that their thus uniting together answered the end proposed therein. In a few months the far greater part of those who had begun 'to fear God and work righteousness,' but were not united together, grew faint in their minds, and fell back into what they were before. Meanwhile the far greater part of those who were thus united together continued 'striving to enter in at the strait gate,' and 'to lay hold on eternal life.'

"Upon reflection I could not but observe, This was the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times those whom God sent forth 'preached the gospel to every creature.' And the *οἱ ἀκροαταί*, 'the body of hearers,' were mostly either Jews or Heathens; but as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth, as to

forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these κατηχουμενοι, 'catechumens,' (as they were then called,) apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities." \*

From the observations which I have embodied in the note at the end of this letter, you will see that class-meetings are only an improvement of what already existed. Meetings for religious conference and advice had been held for more than half a century before "John Wesley blew his trumpet, and waked them which slept." But we find not that any persons were officially appointed to take charge of and conduct them.

That kind of Christian communion, to which Mr. Wesley gave a palpable form, and an extended and permanent basis, had, in substance, been recommended and practised by several eminent divines, both in this country

\* Wesley's Works, vol. viii. 8vo. 3d edit. pp. 249—251.



and in some of the reformed churches on the continent of Europe.

The language of that profound scholar, HENRY AINSWORTH, on this subject, is very explicit : “ God,” says he, “ who hath chosen and called us in Christ, from this world, and fellowship of all wicked ones therein, to be his, and serve him ; hath further required at our hands, that we who are called should not live alone, or asunder by ourselves, but join together, and so entertain and nourish a loving and holy communion one with another, in the unity of the Spirit, by the bond of peace. (The) benefit of this society is, the mutual aid, strengthening, and consolation, one of another, in all other Christian duties, both public and private ; for, as the several members of a man’s body are serviceable to the whole, and to each other, so are the saints among themselves, having every one their measure of faith, their diversity of gifts and graces from God, that what is wanting in one may be supplied by another. And hence do arise the mutual exhorting ; (1 Thess. v. 11 ; ) and building up of one another in faith ; (Heb. iii. 13 ; ) labouring together unto the truth ; (3 John 8 ; ) admonishing the unruly, comforting the feeble-



mindful, bearing with the weak ; (1 Thess. v. 14 ;) considering one another, to provoke unto love and good works ; (Heb. x. 24 ;) rebuking for sin and trespass ; (Luke xviii. 39 ;) confessing of faults one to another, and praying one for another ; (James v. 16 ;) bearing one another's burdens ; (Gal. vi. 2 ;) rejoicing with them that rejoice, and weeping with them that are in trouble ; (Rom. xii. 15 ;) communicating to the afflictions, and distributing to the necessities, one of another ; (Phil. iv. 14 ; Rom. xii. 13 ;) visiting them in sickness ; mourning and labouring in prayer for them ; with many other offices of like nature, for the refreshing of soul and body ; all which are found and felt in this holy communion and body, wherein if one member suffer, all suffer with it ; and if one be had in honour, all rejoice with it ; (1 Cor. xii. 26 ;) so near a conjunction doth God's Spirit work in the hearts of the faithful, which maketh them to look, not every one to his own things, but every one also on the things of others. (Phil. ii. 4.)" \*

ISAAC AMBROSE, a parochial clergyman, previous to the passing of the Act of Uni-

\* "Of the Communion of Saints." By Henry Ainsworth. Edinburgh edit. 12mo. 1789, pp. 161, 170.

formity, says, "Christians must drive an open and free trade: they must teach one another the mysteries of godliness. Tell your experience, and tell your conflicts, and tell your comforts. As iron sharpeneth iron, as rubbing of the hands maketh both warm, and as live coals maketh the rest to burn, so let the fruit of society be mutually sharpening, warming, and influencing. Christians should also bewail their failings, infirmities, deadness, coldness, narrowness, and unprofitableness one to another; to see whether others have been in the same case; what course they took, and what remedy they procured. Many souls may perish through too much modesty and reserve. In the prophet's time, when proud scorers talked vainly, and did what they list, then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another. No doubt, they spake of God, of his counsels, and of his works and ways; of his providence and goodness, and of the baseness of atheistical thoughts. Would Christians thus meet and exchange words and actions, they might build up one another; and they might strengthen and encourage one another, as the brethren did St. Paul. And have we not an express command

for this duty of conference? 'Thus shall ye say every one to his neighbour, What hath the Lord answered? and, What hath he spoken?' (Jer. xxiii. 35.)"\* It was this kind of conference that Ambrose was accustomed to practise with the people of his charge.

SCUDDER, rector of Collingborn-Duriat, Wiltshire, says, "Forsake not the fellowship, or consorting, with the godly, as the manner of some is; but with David, as much as may be, be a companion with them that fear God. (Psalm cxix. 63.) When you meet with those that fear God, make improvement of the communion of saints, especially in the communion of things spiritual, edifying yourselves in your most holy faith, by holy speech and conference. I commend this Christian society in brotherly love, the rather, because, 1. There is nothing giveth a more sensible evidence of your conversion, and translation from death to life, than this. 2. Nothing doth more further the increase and power of godliness in any place or person than this. For, let it be observed, though there be never such an excellent ministry in any

\* "Media: or, The Middle Things." By ISAAC AMBROSE, 4to. Second Edit. 1652, pp. 292—294, 297.

place; you shall see little thriving in grace amongst the people, until many of them become of one heart, showing it by consorting together in brotherly fellowship, in the communion of saints. 3. Nothing bringeth more feeling, joy, comfort, and delight, (next the communion with God in Christ,) than the actual communion of saints, and the love of the brethren. It is the beginning of that our happiness on earth, which shall be perfected in heaven." \*

"There will be little matter of doubt or controversy," says DR. HAMMOND, "but that private, frequent, spiritual, conference betwixt fellow-Christians, but especially (and in matters of high concernment and difficulty) between the presbyter and those of his charge, even in the time of health; and peculiarly that part of it which is spent in the discussion of every man's special sins and infirmities and inclinations, may prove very useful and advantageous (in order to spiritual direction, reproof, and comfort) to the making the man of God perfect. And, to tell the truth, if the

\* "The Christian's daily Walk in holy Security and Peace." By HENRY SCUDDER. 18mo. 1642. pp. 240, 250.

pride and self-conceit of some, the wretchlessness of others, the bashfulness of a third sort, the nauseating and instant satiety of any good in a fourth, the follies of men, and the artifices of Satan had not put this practice quite out of fashion among us, there is no doubt but more good might be done by ministers this way, than is now done by any other means separated from the use of this." \*

BISHOP JEREMY TAYLOR, when speaking of the communion of saints, says, "That is, the communion of Christians, because by reason of their holy faith they are called saints in scripture, as being begotten by God unto lively faith, and cleansed by believing; and by this faith, and the profession of a holy life in obedience to Jesus Christ, they are separated from the world, called to a knowledge of the truth, justified before God, and endued with the Holy Spirit of grace. I believe that all people who desire the benefit of the gospel, are bound to have fellowship and society with these saints, and communicate with them in their holy things, in their

\* "Of the Power of the Keys: or, Of Binding and Loosing." By HENRY HAMMOND, D.D. 4to. 1647, chap. iii. sect. civ. p. 113.

faith, and in their hope, and in their sacraments, and in their prayers, and in their government; and must do them all the acts of charity and mutual help which they can and are required to; which communion must be kept in inward things always, and in all persons; and testified by outward acts always, when it is possible, and may be done on just and holy conditions." \*

I will adduce one other testimony only, (although the number might easily be multiplied,) and that is RICHARD BAXTER'S. On the question at large, he says, "All members have an inward inclination to hold communion with fellow-members, so far as they discern them to be members indeed. As fire would to fire, and water would to water, and earth to earth, and every thing to its like; so Christians would have actual communion with Christians, as delighting in each other, and loving Christ in each other, and finding benefit by each other's communion. Though I know this inclination may be much

\* See "The Golden Grove," in the Practical Works of Bishop Jeremy Taylor, by the Rev. GEORGE CROLY, LL.D. vol. vi. pp. 31, 32.

kept from execution, and communion much hindered, by mistakes about the nature and manner and requisites of it, and by infirmities and passions of our own." \*

Again : he says, "There are many things considerable in holy conference that make it delightful. It is the conference of dearest friends. Their conference proceeds from the Spirit of grace. Their conference is about the highest, the most necessary, the most excellent things. It is our own case which we hear our brethren open. They speak our very hearts, as if they had seen them ; because it is the same work of the same Spirit which they describe. Yea, when they complain of their own infirmities, it is with our complaints, and they tell us of that which we are troubled with ourselves ; and we perceive we are not singular in our troubles ; but that our case is the case of other servants of the Lord. They speak not by hearsay only, but by experience. They tell us of the discoveries that illuminating grace hath made to their

\* "The true Catholic, and Catholic Church, described." By RICHARD BAXTER. Works, vol. xvi. 8vo. p. 298.



own souls, and of the many evils they have been saved from, and the communion they have had with God, and the prayers which he hath heard, and the many and great deliverances he hath granted them. They relate their conflicts with temptations, and their conquests; their striving against their ancient lusts, and how they have overcome them; and the sweet refreshings which their souls have had in the exercise of love and faith and hope. They can direct each other in their difficulties, and encourage each other in holy ways, and strengthen one another in holy resolutions, and comfort one another with the same comforts that they themselves have been comforted with by the Lord. And may not our hearts rejoice and burn within us, while we discourse of such important things as these, in such a serious, experimental, edifying manner?

“O, Christians!” says he, “did not your graces languish by your own neglect, and your souls grow out of relish with these spiritual and most excellent things, your speeches of them would be more savoury; you would be more frequent, lively, and cheerful in your discourses of holy things; and then your con-



verse would be more edifying and delightful to each other." \*

In weekly catechetical exercises among his parishioners, Richard Baxter endeavoured to ascertain what they knew respecting experimental religion. "I first," says he, "helped them to understand it, and next inquired modestly into the state of their souls; and, lastly, endeavoured to set all home to the convincing, awakening, and resolving of their hearts according to their several conditions. I found it so effectual, through the blessing of God, that few went away without some seeming humiliation, conviction, and purpose, and promise for a holy life." And he makes the following observation: "Of all the works I ever attempted, this yielded me most comfort in the practice of it." †

The testimonies which I have thus quoted will be sufficient to show you that some such Christian fellowship as is practised among the Wesleyan Methodists, and in which you take so active a part, was desired and approved,

\* "A Saint or a Brute." Works, 8vo. vol. x. pp. 323, 324.

† "Life," part i. pp. 179, 180, quoted by ORME, in his "Life of Baxter," pp. 181, 182.

and in some instances practised, by eminent men, both episcopalians and others, who were anxious for the edification of that church which is Christ's body, long before Methodism had a place on the earth.

Thus, then, with the express warrant of holy scripture, and the testimonies of such men as I have mentioned, you will be satisfied that by doing your utmost to promote that kind of Christian communion which is in use among us, you will thereby promote the glory of God, and the welfare of man.

Yours, &c.

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NOTE, p. 22.

THERE then existed in London, for instance, 1. "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New-England, and the parts adjacent in America," established by King Charles II., in 1661. 2. "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts," instituted in 1701. 3. "The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," which was also instituted in 1701. 4. "The Society for Reformation of Manners," which was commenced by five or six gentlemen of the church of England, and sanctioned, in consequence of an address from the archbishops and bishops, by royal proclama-

tion, in 1691. 5. There were twenty societies in London and Westminster at the beginning of the eighteenth century, "of various qualities and functions, formed," as Dr. Woodward says, "in a subordination and correspondence one with another, and engaged in this Christian design (of reformation); all which have their set hours and places of meeting to direct, support, and execute this their great undertaking." 6. There were "The Religious Societies," of which there were forty at the time Dr. Woodward wrote his account of them. The members of these societies were the most active members of "the Society for the Reformation of Manners," and of other societies, which had for their object the suppression of vice. It was to these religious societies, doubtless, that Mr. Wesley had special reference in the above remarks; and, as Methodism seems to have been grafted on these societies, or rather to have swallowed them up, it may be interesting to know something more respecting them. It appears they were established about 1677. Dr. Woodward says, "So far as I am able to trace their first rise, it was thus introduced by the gracious providence of God; it is now about two and thirty years ago that several young men of the church of England, in the cities of London and Westminster, were about the same time touched with a very affecting sense of their sins, and began to apply themselves in a very serious manner to religious thoughts and purposes. I was, about that time, made privy to the spiritual sorrows of one of them, who with floods of tears lamented that he had not till then had any affecting apprehensions of the glorious majesty and perfections of Almighty God, nor of his infinite love to men, in his Son, Jesus

Christ : and that he had not before felt any just conceptions of the immense evil of every offence against God, though it be but, said he, in the wilful neglect or misperformance of any duty to him. But now he saw and groaned under all this, in very sharp and pungent convictions. And withal, perceiving the universal corruption of human nature, and the deplorable crookedness and deceit of man's heart, and with what a world of temptations we are encompassed, being withal besieged by many legions of infernal spirits ; when he considered all this, his soul was even poured out within him, and he was in danger of being overwhelmed with excessive sorrow. The case was very much the same with several young men at the same time, as he then told me ; some of whom had been greatly tempted by the devil, that murderer from the beginning, to lay violent hands on themselves ; which was also, he confessed, his own temptation ; and that so urgent sometimes, that sleep departed from his eyes, as well as rest from his soul." (Observe, all this happened before Methodism had any existence !) "In this mournful season, these disconsolate convicted persons often resorted to their ministers for spiritual advice and succour ; betaking themselves in good earnest to the ways of real piety and eternal peace. And it many times fell out, as the same person informed me, that several of them met together at the house of their spiritual physician, seeking cure for their wounded spirits ; and so contracted a little acquaintance by those providential interviews.

"The benefit of Dr. Horneck's awakening sermons, and the morning lectures on the Lord's day in Cornhill, preached by Mr. Smithie, (chiefly designed for the

instruction of youth,) having occasioned much of this happy work upon the spirits of these young men, they did more particularly apply themselves to these divines for direction, who had been instruments in the hand of God for their conviction. And upon their frequent application to these and other ministers, it was advised that since their troubles arose from the same spiritual cause, and that their inclinations and resolutions centered in the same purpose of a holy life, they would meet together once a week, and apply themselves to good discourse, and things wherein they might edify one another. And for the better regulation of their meetings, several rules were prescribed them, being such as seemed most proper to effect the end proposed. Upon this they met together, and kept to their rules, and at every meeting (as it was advised) they considered the wants of the poor. These young men soon found the benefit of their conferences one with another, by which, as some of them have told me with joy, they better discovered their corruptions, the devil's temptations, and how to countermines his subtle devices; as to which, *each person communicated his experiences to the rest.*

“For the better management of their common stock for charitable purposes, they made choice of *two stewards*. These were appointed first in 1678.

“In the end of the reign of Charles II., and during the reign of James II., ‘when all private meetings were suspected,’ the members of these societies met with much discouragement, and many were turned from the way of righteousness. The events which transpired caused them ‘to change the name of the society for that of a club; and instead of meeting at a friend’s

house, who might be endangered by it, they adjourned to some public house or other where they could have a room to themselves ; and, under the pretext of spending a shilling or two, they conferred seriously together in the same religious manner as formerly, by which honest artifice they carried on their good design without interruption.’ ”

It was not without sufficient reason that they thus acted, as the following fact, related in Bennet’s “*Memoirs of the Reformation*,” p. 289, will show : “ A number of young men in the town of Newcastle, (about twenty,) met together once a week for mutual assistance and improvement in religion ; (here was a religious society ;) for which purpose they spent some time in prayer and conference ; having subscribed a paper containing rules, for the better ordering of such society, and the work to be done is taken out of a book \* of Mr. Isaac Ambrose’s. One of the society turns informer, and, having a copy of this dangerous paper, with the names of the subscribers, makes a discovery, and the whole matter was laid before (that execrable wretch) Judge Jefferies at the assizes ; by which it appeared to his lordship, that about twenty young fanatics met together weekly to pray and talk about religion, &c. : his lordship, whose business lay as much with such as these, as with felons, &c., resolved to make examples of them. When he was prepared to proceed against them, he ordered the doors of the court to be locked up, and kept locked till such of the young men as were in court were secured ; and, at the same time, dispatched the sheriff with the proper officers to

\* “*Media ; or Middle Things.*”



apprehend the rest, the doors being still kept closed, which made no small noise and stir in the town. His lordship, as his manner was, began to breathe out threatening against the dissenters. And whereas, some of the elder of them, with whom his lordship would have taken an occasion to have talked, were withdrawn from the town; he said, *He would take the cubs, and that would make the old foxes appear.*"

The offenders are presented before his lordship's tribunal. Such as knew his lordship's character will easily imagine (and some will remember it) with how much contempt and indignation he would look down upon these young men. One of them, Mr. Thomas Verner, his lordship was pleased to single out, no question to triumph over his ignorance, and thereby expose all the rest. "Can you read, sirrah?" says he; "Yes, my lord," answered Mr. Verner. "Reach him the book," says the judge. The clerk reaches him his Latin Testament. The young man begins to read Matt. vii. 1, (it being the first place his eye lit upon, without any design in him, as he affirmed afterwards,) *Ne judicate, ne judicemini, &c.* "Construe it, sirrah," says the judge, which he did: "*Judge not, lest ye be judged: for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:*" upon which, it is said, his lordship was a little struck, and sat in a pause for some while.

"The issue of the matter was this, that the young men, though never tried, were sent to gaol, where they lay above a year, that is, from the assizes in 1683, till the first assizes after the death of king Charles II., when they were called upon and set at liberty, with this reprimand from the judge, *Go, and sin no more, lest a worse*



*thing come unto you ; adding, that the king coming to the throne had saved all their lives."* It appears they were indicted for high treason ; and as there was a packed jury, there is no doubt but they would have suffered death.

It is probable that this "religious society" in Newcastle was in existence when John Wesley visited that town in 1742 ; for he on that occasion found some who told him, they were members of a religious society, which had subsisted for many years, that they had a fine library, and that the steward read a sermon every Sunday. (Works, vol. i. p. 374.)

On the accession of William and Mary, the members of these societies came out of their hiding-places, and acted as they did at the commencement of their operations, having by their constancy, piety, and good service, secured public confidence and esteem.

"The first design," says Dr. Woodward, "of those who joined in this religious fellowship, looked no farther than the mutual assistance and consolation one of another, in their Christian warfare ; that, by their interchanged counsels and exhortations, they might the better maintain their integrity in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. But as their sense of the blessedness of religion, and the value of immortal souls, increased, they could not but exercise bowels of compassion towards such as discovered little concern about these important matters. This inclined them to endeavour, by discourse with their acquaintance, at proper seasons, to press upon them those divine arguments, whereby themselves had been roused out of a state of carnal insensibleness." Finding that they were suc-

cessful in their efforts, "they made a private order at one of their assemblies, that *every one should endeavour to bring one other at least* into their society, which they did to good effect. Thus these religious fraternities grew and increased even till they became conspicuous, and in some degree famous.

"There is," he continues, "such love amongst those of them that have fallen under my observation, that scarce any natural brothers are so affectionate; and those who are newly admitted are soon contracted into the same fellowship of Christian brotherhood. They are also far from rigid censure and unkind treatment of any sorts of Christians. As they truly aim at real Christianity, so they value it wherever they find it."

These societies, in the course of time, were established in various parts of the nation; as at Nottingham, Gloucester, Bristol, Hull, Leicester, &c.; also in Dublin and other parts of Ireland.

It was at one of these "religious societies" that John Wesley obtained saving religion. "I went very unwillingly," says he, "to a society in Aldersgate-street, London, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death." And it was in one of these societies, which he designated "a little society," which was accustomed to meet in St. Nicholas-street, Bristol, that he expounded the word of God, on his visit to that

city in the spring of 1739. After the "United Societies" of the Methodists were established, the "religious societies" seem to have dwindled away, or to have been absorbed in them. See Wesley's Works, vol. i. p. 103; Dr. Woodward's "Account of the Rise and Progress of the religious Societies in London," &c.; the sixth edition of which was published in 1744; also, "An Account of the Progress of the Reformation of Manners in England," &c., of which there were fourteen editions in 1707; and Dr. Gillies's "Historical Collections," vol. i. pp. 423—425.

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## LETTER III.

## ON THE QUALIFICATIONS WHICH A CLASS-LEADER SHOULD POSSESS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I do not wish to discourage you by any observations which I may make on this subject, but rather to fill you with a laudable desire that you may possess every necessary qualification for your office.

The work to which you have been appointed is important; and requires certain qualifications for the right discharge of its duties. Common qualifications will not be sufficient. As the qualifications of a captain

are expected to be superior to those of a common soldier, and the qualifications of a teacher superior to those of his pupil ; so your qualifications ought to be superior to those possessed by the members of the church in general.

Every Class-Leader ought to be distinguished by grace and gifts. Grace and gifts ought, in every case, to go together. A person who is destitute of either, is without the necessary pre-requisites for this responsible and arduous undertaking.

Allow me to say, then, that you ought to possess grace ; and no degree of grace short of saving grace will do. Without the enjoyment of personal salvation, no person ought to be inducted into this office ; and without this, whatever attempts may be made to prevail upon a person to take the office, he ought not, on any account, to yield. Nor can simply being in a state of salvation be considered all that is necessary on religious grounds. Every Leader ought to be a man of much and deep experience. And if he be not "cleansed from all unrighteousness," and "sanctified wholly," he ought, by the whole tenor of his conduct, to discover that he is earnestly desir-

ing and seeking this entire consecration to God.

The necessity of what I have stated will appear obvious, if you take into consideration the various states of those of whom you have or may have the care. Awakened sinners desiring to flee from the wrath to come, broken-hearted penitents seeking for pardoning mercy, the tempted in heaviness through manifold conflicts with the powers of darkness, and believers who cannot be satisfied without being "filled with all the fulness of God,"—will be among those who will associate with you in Christian fellowship, and to whom you will have to administer suitable advice. Now, how can you deal with these, unless you be a man of much experience? How can you encourage and direct a sinner who feels all the anguish of a wounded spirit, if you never felt the smart? And how can you instruct a penitent to believe in Christ with his "heart unto righteousness," if you never so believed? And how can you speak a word of comfort to those who are going heavily because of the adversary, if you were never delivered from temptation? And how can you explain "the deep things of God" to his children, if you

never attempted to reach the heights and fathom the depths of holiness? Unless you be well acquainted with experimental religion, you will be completely at a loss on all these vital questions. You will be as much disqualified to assist such persons as these, as the unlearned are to solve algebraical questions, or to construe sentences in Greek.

It is evident that a superficial piety in your case will not be enough. It will be felt by the members of your class, and have an injurious tendency. They will expect more from you than you will be able to give. For the sake of the souls which are intrusted to you, then, let your piety be of the right cast. Let it be above the common standard, and let it be habitually so. Evermore have "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ;" evermore feel his "love shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto you;" evermore have "the Spirit of adoption, crying, Abba, Father;" evermore let your communion be with the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and evermore "rejoice in hope of the glory of God." These are new-covenant privileges,—privileges which are enjoyed by all the members of Christ's mys-

tical body, and which ought, therefore, to be enjoyed in a more eminent degree by the more honoured members to whom important duties are assigned.

It may be taken for granted that as your piety is, so, in the general, will be the piety of those over whom you are appointed to watch. Their piety will be greatly influenced by yours. This is the order of nature. This is the order of God. We have numerous exemplifications that it is so in every direction. You ought, therefore, to be at great pains to mould your piety into that form which will best serve as a model for theirs. For, whether you are aware of it or not, they will be led, although, perhaps, imperceptibly and insensibly, to fashion themselves after it. They will drink into your spirit, and copy your example. It is a matter of vast importance, then, that your piety should have a high tone, and be of a rich and healthy and vigorous character.

Your piety, for instance, should be *clear*. As it flows from a pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, it should be like it, "as clear as crystal." There should be nothing in your



sentiments or feelings to render it otherwise. Take care that there is not. Let the water of life, of which you have been the happy partaker, have no impure or earthly sediment mixed with it. Let the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which the Holy Spirit has caused, through the eyes of your understanding, to shine into your soul, be obscured by no darkness; but let it shine "more and more to the perfect day." Always have clear perceptions of that glorious truth, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;" and always have a full assurance of your acceptance with God through the medium of that reconciliation; and thus, without any hesitation, "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." Be clear in *your* experience, that your members may be clear in theirs. Never let there be any thing doubtful in the manner in which you express yourself; but be as definite and as explicit as possible.

Your piety should be *deep*. Not like a stream the current of which is frequently interrupted by broken fragments of rocks, and accumulations of pebbles; but like a stream

the flow of which is uniform and even. Let the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, be unto you as "waters to swim in, a river which cannot be passed over." You have to do with the depths of God, depths of wisdom, depths of knowledge, depths of love, and depths of holiness. Let your piety correspond with these. Get into the depths. Let forth your affections on the Holy One of Israel. Launch into the great deep, into the ocean of God's infinite and everlasting love.

"Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,  
And lost in his immensity."

You have to conduct others to the possession of all that is attainable in Christianity; and how can you do this unless you act the part of a guide, and go before them? Feel the position in which you stand, and be not straitened in yourself. You can scarcely expect those who meet with you in Christian communion to be your superiors in holiness, and to take the lead of you. This is the relation in which you ought to stand to them. O, then, get possessed of the riches of divine grace, and point others to the treasure! Open your heart wide, and keep it open to receive

the most plentiful effusions of the Holy Ghost. Earnestly desire these, and expect and believe, and God will do for you "exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us."

Your piety ought to be *consistent*. The eyes of the church and of the world are more especially upon you, because of the office you hold; and they expect more from you than from others. Hence you ought to walk very circumspectly, and to maintain a consistency of character; and to let all your actions, on all occasions, and under all circumstances, harmonize with the great truths of divine revelation. Endeavour so to do. Never be a stumbling-block in the way of the weak. Never cause "the way of truth to be evil spoken of." Never bring any reproach on the religion of Christ. Study "to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called;" "walk as Christ also walked." Recommend by your deportment, both in public and private life, "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise,

think on these things." (Phil. iv. 8.) "Be an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity." (1 Tim. iv. 12.) Much injury is done to the cause of religion by the inconsistency of its professors, and especially when such professors happen to be official characters. Never rank among this class of persons. And never do any thing which would sink you in the estimation of your members, or which would lessen your influence with them, or which would tend to alienate their affections from you.

Your piety ought to be characterized by *zeal*. It should be distinguished by life and warmth and activity. If you are not zealous, how can you expect your members to be so? Some of them, through a variety of causes, will occasionally become cold and indifferent; and how can you expect to be the instrument of giving increased circulation to the life-blood of their religion, if you be in similar circumstances? Cold to cold will never produce heat. Whatever you do, keep the fire of divine love burning in your heart. Like the fire on the altar under the olden dispensation, let it never go out. You may not

naturally be of a warm temperament ; on the contrary, you may be phlegmatic : if so, try, from time to time, to stir yourself up. There are topics connected with Christianity, the consideration of which is sufficient to arouse the most torpid souls. O, when you feel you are the subject of spiritual insensibility ; when the chill of a moral winter has come over you, and frozen your affections ; when you are conscious of great apathy and indifference, as it respects your own welfare and that of others ; turn your attention to these topics, and dwell upon them. Think of the great, the unparalleled love of God ! Think of the heart-rending sufferings, the agonies, the blood-shedding, and the sacrificial death of your Saviour ! Think of the coming, and power, and signs, and wonders of the Holy Ghost ! Think of the apostles, and of the evangelists, and of a noble army of martyrs, and of an innumerable host of confessors, and of what they endured "in the kingdom and patience of Jesus !" Think of the great and precious promises of divine revelation, and the certainty of their fulfilment ! Think of the infinite value of saving religion, and the unspeakable worth of immortal souls ! Think

religion is a melancholy thing, and an enemy to every thing in the form of enjoyment. Let every thing about you proclaim that no man is so happy as the man of God; and that they only live in pleasure who live to him. Tell all with whom you are connected, tell them by your countenance, and in every other way in your power, that religion is an enemy to no pleasures; and forbids none but soul-damning pleasures, "the pleasures of sin." Tell them its pleasures are high, rational, solid, elevating, heavenly, and abiding; that they never tire, never satiate, never disgust, and are never followed by remorse; that they become richer and sweeter and fresher, and fresher and richer and sweeter, in proportion as they are enjoyed; and that they are capable of filling, and of filling for ever, all the powers and capacities of the soul "unutterably full of glory and of God;" and invite them to partake of them. No little prejudice has been raised against vital Christianity by the gloomy aspect and long-faced demeanour of some of its professors. It is true, that religion is a serious subject; but it admits of the greatest possible cheerfulness. If the man whose "rejoicing is in the testimony of his

conscience," if he who possesses love and peace and joy and immortal hopes,—if a child of God, and an heir of heaven, cannot be cheerful, who can? See to it, then, that your looks never belie your religion by false appearances. Do not injure the cause of God by this means. Give no one occasion to say, "I will not meet with that man for Christian communion, because he always looks so melancholy and unhappy; I will not be religious, because many who are so appear to be so miserable." Be cheerful, but not trifling; serious, but not sad. O that the Leaders of the flocks of our Israel would let all men see the comfort they enjoy, by their happy-looking faces!

Your piety, moreover, ought to be distinguished by its *growth*. It should ever be on the increase. You are bound to be an example to those who are committed to your care, by your growth in grace. Strive to be so. Increase with all "the increase of God." Go on in your honourable career to immortality; from "strength to strength," from light to light, from truth to truth, from purity to purity, from victory to victory, and from "glory to glory," until you stand before the



God of gods in Zion. You are, in an inferior sense, like the Captain of our salvation, the leader on of others to glory. Act in character. Head them. Invite them to come forward. Beckon and urge them on. Be able to bid them follow you, as you "follow Christ." And, feeling your manifold defects in your onward course and upward tendencies, like the great apostle of the Gentiles, say, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect : but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus ;" and, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. iii. 12—14.)

Such, then, ought your piety to be, in order that you may be qualified for the office you sustain. And, O my friend, in such an age as this,—an age drunk with worldly and commercial speculations, an age in which scriptural godliness is being sapped and undermined on every hand ; in which our legislators are, by degrees, breaking down our ancient barriers, and advocating the wildest

latitudinarianism ; in which practical antinomianism is becoming rampant, and those from whom we might have expected better things are forsaking "the old paths," and sacrificing that which is for the weal of their own souls, and the souls of their children, to worldly respectability ; in which the damnable dogma of baptismal regeneration is being propagated with a zeal worthy of a nobler cause ; in which a system of externalism is being substituted for justification by faith, and sanctification through the Spirit ; in which an attempt is being made to palm an image of the beast upon the nation, and the beast itself is becoming more and more clamorous for power, and concession after concession is being made to it ; in which infidelity and popery are combining their energies against every thing vital in religion ; and in which there is so much worldliness, and laxity of moral principle, and formalism, and lukewarmness, and backsliding in heart, in the churches of God : I say, in such an age as this, permit me to urge you to TAKE HEED TO YOUR PIETY. This is of great importance. Much, indescribably much, depends upon this. Let

it, then, be well-grounded, genuine, sincere, active, useful, triumphant !

But here I would observe, saving religion of itself is not sufficient to qualify a person for the office of a Class-Leader. There are many persons who, notwithstanding they are the saved of the Lord, are not at all fit for this office. They are without the requisite gifts ; and there must, in every case, be gifts as well as grace. The gifts to which I refer, are such as you ought to possess and cultivate. It is assumed by your appointment to office, that you do possess these gifts, to some extent, or otherwise you would not have received the appointment. 1. It is necessary, for instance, inasmuch as you have to conduct the devotional services of the members of your class, and to be their mouth unto God, that you should be able to express yourself with propriety in prayer. 2. It is necessary, inasmuch as you have to teach knowledge, that you should have an aptitude in communicating it. 3. It is necessary that you should be well versed in the great truths of divine revelation. It is obvious that you ought to have more knowledge of the things of God,

than, for the most part, they over whom you are placed have; and hence your minds should be well stored with “doctrines according to godliness.” The word of God ought “to dwell in you richly,” that you may be able to bring out of your treasury things new and old; and to give advice on every point of experimental religion. And, 4. It is very desirable that you should be familiar with the history, discipline, and doctrines of that section of the church to which you have given your adhesion, and for the welfare of which you labour.

But, as you are a Leader, and I have no desire to discourage you, I shall reserve what I have further to say on this subject to my next communication; in which I shall dwell a little on the duty of improving the gifts which you already possess, in order that you may become increasingly useful.

Yours, &c.

## LETTER IV.

## ON THE DUTIES OF A CLASS-LEADER.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The duties of a Class-Leader are numerous and important, and may be divided into three branches: First. Those which relate to yourself in your official capacity. Secondly. Those which relate to the members of your class. And, Thirdly. Those which relate to your ministers and the church at large.

I shall begin, first, with the duties which relate to yourself, and which relate to you, not merely as a private member, but as an office-bearer in the church of God. These shall form the subject of this letter, and to the other I will devote two additional letters, taking them in order. As it respects yourself, then, it is your duty:—

*To attend especially to personal religion.*—On this I have said much to you already, and, therefore, need not enlarge; only, I would add, it behoves you to keep your soul always alive to God, and to carry the warmth and vigour of your piety with you into all your

meetings. Let the unction of the Holy Spirit dwell in your heart, and feel that you have power to speak for God, and to pray unto him, on all occasions. Never have this power to seek ; especially when you go to the assembly of saints. Let all your powers and faculties be under the influence of a divine and sacred energy ; and be wholly devoted to God.

*To cherish an ardent love for souls.*—Without this you cannot feel that lively interest in the well-being of those intrusted to you which you ought to do ; nor will you deny yourself, and labour, as you ought to do, to promote the prosperity of Zion. Every Class-Leader ought to have fellowship with Christ in his sufferings ; and to feel there is nothing in the world—not the gaining of wealth, not the acquisition of honour, not the preservation of health, not the prolonging of life—so important as the salvation of souls. Whenever, therefore, you perceive your zeal begins to languish, endeavour to rouse yourself, and get it kindled afresh, by calling to remembrance that you are engaged in promoting the interests of souls for whom Christ died ; of souls which are the purchase of the infinitely precious blood of the Son of God.

*To be condescending and easy of access.—*

The members of your class will want your advice and counsel on many occasions ; encourage them to seek for this rather than otherwise. Let there be nothing stern and forbidding in your intercourse with them. If you have been more favoured by Providence than some of them have been, learn to stoop to them. Attend to the apostolic injunction, “ Condescend to men of low estate ; ” and thus win upon them, and gain their confidence and affections by being their counsellor and friend. By pursuing such a course as this, they will profit the more by your efforts to do them spiritual good.

*To improve your mind.—*It may be you were not favoured in early life with the advantages of education, and that your opportunities for acquiring knowledge since that period have been few ; and hence, when you became a Class-Leader, you were slightly furnished with it ; and it may be you are so still. Do you feel this ? Are you convinced that it is so ? Then try for improvement. There is an impression abroad that the times are in advance of the Class-Leaders in the Methodist Connexion ; that, as it respects men-



tal culture, they have not kept pace with the improved state of the population with which they are surrounded. I fear there is some ground for this impression. So far as you are concerned, try to roll away the reproach. Be emulous, very emulous, for mental advancement. It is true, that many who meet with you will be satisfied with little ; a few common-place observations, often repeated, are all they expect or desire. But there are others who have had superior educational, as well as religious, advantages, who will look for more ; and will be disappointed unless they have it. It is your duty to be solicitous to meet their wishes ; strive to do this. Make preparation for your weekly meeting. Dwell upon the cases you are likely to meet with ; and think of the advice which will be the most suitable and profitable to administer in every case. Do not study for the purpose of declamation and effect ; but for the purpose of instruction and edification and comfort. Always give the advice which is needful. Never wander from the point. Guard against using the same phraseology, and pursuing the same line of argument, on all occasions. Try, as much as possible, to vary your language and

observations, as this will tend to make your meetings the more interesting. In order that you may be qualified to do these things, **READ.** Whether you will or not, **YOU MUST BE A READER.** You have to communicate knowledge, and you cannot communicate it unless you have it; and you cannot have it as you ought, without "giving attendance unto reading." **READ** then; your station in the church requires that you should. It is absolutely necessary to your usefulness. Read to improve your understanding, to inform your judgment, to enlarge your mind, and to increase your piety. Get clear views of every doctrinal and experimental truth of our holy religion. Be able to define repentance, saving faith, justification, adoption, regeneration, and entire sanctification; and to resolve cases of conscience; and to satisfy reasonable and serious inquirers respecting the most important points which have been mooted by the controversialists of Christendom; and to state the advantages to be derived from a connexion with Methodism; and to give all necessary information respecting its polity and church-government. But I would recommend you, chiefly, to peruse those books in which doc-

trinal, experimental, and practical truths are combined ; and especially those which are of a devotional character, that your hearts may be warmed, and the spirit of your piety fed, while your knowledge is being increased ; not forgetting select religious biography.\* These last will be of great service to you in unveiling the inward movements of the souls of men. If you do not possess the books which it is desirable you should read, endeavour to get them. If your circumstances are such that you cannot afford to purchase them, try to borrow them. Any how, READ, READ, READ ! Redeem time, practise self-denial, and, if possible, abridge the hours of rest, to do this. Bear this in mind,—that a person only gets conformed to the image of God in proportion as he grows in knowledge, as well as in grace. And here, permit me to say, strive to use correct language. If you have been in the habit of employing provincialisms, or words which form a portion of the corrupt dialect of the neighbourhood where you reside, strive to break yourself of the habit. Also, avoid all mannerisms, such as canting, whining, and affected tones, turning up of the eyes, and

\* See the note at the end of this Letter, p. 70.

catching or stifling of the breath, while engaged in prayer. Speak in prayer, and on religious subjects in general, with the same natural tone of voice as you do at other times and on other subjects. Abstain from every thing which would tend to prejudice the minds of others against, and give them a distaste for, religion ; and do every thing which will serve to raise religion in their estimation, that they may be brought to Christ and be saved. It is your duty, furthermore,

*To be much in prayer.*—Cultivate the spirit of prayer, and live under its influence. Be a closet Christian. Often retire into secret for the purpose of holding converse with God. Prayer is the key to devotional feeling, to spiritual and heavenly mindedness, and to all grace ; and hence, you will never make much out, either as it respects yourself or those who associate with you, unless you give yourself unto it. Unless you do this, your graces will wither and droop ; your soul will be without strength, and poor, and lean ; and you will feel little concern about the welfare of your class, or the prosperity of Zion. O, then, feel it to be incumbent upon you to be a man of prayer, that you may have power

with God. Pray "always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit." "Pray without ceasing." Take your own necessities, and the necessities of your members, to a throne of grace, and spread them before the Lord; and, through the great High Priest of our profession, prevail upon him to "pour out a blessing, such as there shall not be room enough to receive it." Never have the Spirit of prayer to seek. Let those of whom you have the charge feel, every time they come to commune with you, by the manner in which you engage with God in their behalf, that you have uninterrupted intercourse with him, "and ask and have whatever you want." \*

*To be an example to the flock.*—I refer here

\* It is related of the late Mr. Bealey, of Radcliffe, near Bury, Lancashire, that "on the evening on which he met his class, it was his custom previously to spend an hour in retirement, that he might have opportunity for self-examination, and *intercession for the members*. Often have individuals of his family, when walking in the garden, unperceived by him, observed him on his knees in his chamber in fervent prayer, with his eyes and one hand lifted up to heaven, whilst the other held *the list of those for whom he prayed*."—See Memoirs of Mr. Bealey in the Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine for 1822, vol. xlv. p. 150.

chiefly to your public religious acts. As it respects these, the members of your class will expect you, as their Leader, to be their guide. You are bound, therefore, so to conduct yourself, as not to be the cause, even indirectly, of their going astray. They will look up to you as a pattern, and will narrowly watch all your movements. It becomes you, then, to be very regular in your attendance on the public ordinances of religion, such as prayer-meetings, the ministration of the word, both on week and Sabbath days, and the sacrament of the Lord's supper; and also in observing the quarterly fasts. Never neglect any of these, unless it be unavoidable. If you neglect means of grace, it will be no wonder if your members do so also. If at any period they wish to have an excuse, they will easily find it by saying, "Our Leader does not attend." Never be the means of furnishing them with such an excuse as this. It is, likewise, of great moment, that you should always be seen in your own seat; make an effort to be so. Guard against wandering about from one place of worship to another: a habit of this kind is bad; and if you acquire it, it is sure to exert an injurious influence over your members.



Moreover, be no party to that scandalous custom, which is practised by many, of coming to the house of God, almost always, a quarter of an hour or more after the service has been commenced. Set your face as flint against this. Be there in time yourself; and reprove all with whom you have to do who are not. Example, however, as it respects these persons, will be more powerful and effectual than precept.

*To cultivate and exhibit a public spirit.*— This is what all the members of the church ought to do, but much more those who are officers in it. “None of us liveth to himself,” ought to be the language of every Christian; but it ought to be so especially of those Christians who occupy posts of honour and responsibility. Selfishness is inherent in our nature. It is, perhaps, the last principle of our corrupt hearts which divine grace fully conquers, eradicates, and destroys. We are prone to draw little narrow circles round ourselves, and round our family interests; and we never come out of them except when we are drawn, or almost compelled. You are bound by your calling to guard against a spirit of this kind, and to live as Christ lived; he lived,



not for himself, but for others ; he lived for the church and the world. Imitate his example, as far as you possibly can do so. And, however you may feel interested in your own welfare, and the welfare of the members of your own family, feel more so for the prosperity of the church which God has bought with his own blood. Aim at this ; and crucify selfishness till you can do all you wish. Think of the sacrifices of ease, and friends, and country, and property, and health, and life, which many, both living and dead, have made for the good of the souls of men ; and, to the utmost of your ability, "go and do likewise."

Such are a few of the duties which, in your official capacity, you owe to yourself ; and, if you reflect upon them, you will see both the propriety and necessity of living in the discharge of the whole of them.

Yours, &c.

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NOTE, page 65.

I SHOULD like to insert a list of such books as you should endeavour to obtain and peruse ; but I find a difficulty in so doing : first, because your means of purchasing books may be very limited ; secondly, because you

have not much time for reading ; and, thirdly, because books on all subjects are so numerous, it is not an easy matter to make a proper selection. I will, however, venture to mention some, nearly all of which may be easily obtained through the usual channels, and most of which may be bought for little money ; and many of which are so brief, that if you are diligent you will find time to read them. In biography, I recommend to your attention Watson's Life of the Rev. John Wesley ; Jackson's Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley, abridged ; Benson's Life of the Rev. John Fletcher ; the Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers, in two volumes ; Wesley's Life of Brainerd ; Hannah's Life of the Rev. Theophilus Lessey ; Hannah's Life of the Rev. D. Stoner ; Treffry's Memoirs of the Rev. Richard Treffry, Jun. ; Treffry's Memoirs of the Rev. John Smith ; Harris's Memoirs of the Rev. William Bramwell ; Morgan's Memoirs of Walsh ; Memoirs of Carvosso, by his Son ; and Rogers's (Esther Ann) Experience, Letters, &c. In experimental and practical divinity, I recommend Wesley's Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion ; Wesley's Plain Account of Christian Perfection ; Wesley's Sermons ; Fletcher's Portrait of St. Paul ; Fletcher's Address to Earnest Seekers of Salvation ; Fletcher's Letters ; Alleine's Alarm to Unconverted Sinners ; Alleine's (R.) Instructions about Heart-Work ; Alleine's (R.) World Conquered ; Heywood's Baptismal Bonds renewed ; Baxter's Saints' Rest ; Baxter's Dying Thoughts ; Bennett's Christian Oratory ; Bakewell's Admonitory Counsels addressed to a Methodist ; Barrett's Pastoral Addresses ; Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion ; Hamilton's Life in Earnest ; James's Anxious Inquirer after Salva-

tion directed ; James's Family Monitor ; James's Pastoral Addresses ; Mead's Almost Christian ; Serle's Christian Remembrancer ; Mason on Self-knowledge ; Watts's Death and Heaven, edited by the Rev. Thomas Jackson ; Clarke's Scripture Promises, by M'Nicoll ; and Bunting's Sermon on Justification. And, in addition to these, I recommend Jackson's Centenary of Methodism ; Grindrod's Compendium of the Laws and Regulations of Methodism ; D'Aubigné's History of the Reformation ; Dick's Christian Philosophy ; and Dick's Improvement of Society by the Diffusion of Knowledge. I recommend these books because of their useful character ; and because I think most of them, if not all, by a little economy and management, are within your reach. If you could get a copy of Wesley's Christian Library, it would be a great treasure. I wish every Leader in the Connexion possessed a copy.

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## LETTER V.

### ON THE DUTIES OF A CLASS-LEADER TO HIS MEMBERS.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—The second branch of your duties, as we have already stated, relates directly to those for whose sake you have been appointed to office, and who have been confided to your care.

There are many things, permit me to state, little in themselves, but important in their connexion and bearing, to which, if you wish to be successful as a Leader, you will do well to attend.

I would recommend you, for instance, if it be at all practicable, to secure a comfortable place of meeting. There is more in this than appears at first sight. They, however, who understand human nature, will see at once what I mean by this suggestion. Let the place, wherever it can be so, be the vestry of the chapel, or a school-room, rather than a private house. There may be some exceptions to this; but I speak as to the general rule. Endeavour to remove all ground of objection from those who profess to meet in class, and from those who are disposed to meet, on account of the place in which you may assemble. There are some whose tone of piety is very low, and some infirm and delicate people, who are frequently disposed to make something connected with the place of meeting a plea for non-attendance; try to prevent this if you can. Let your class-room be unobjectionable,—warm in winter, and properly ventilated in summer.

It behoves you, also, to be punctual in beginning at the time appointed. Never let

your members have to wait for you ; the feeling of suspense, and the spirit of impatience, and the fear of being disappointed, which this occasions, may prevent them from getting the good which they otherwise would do. Beside, if you are in the habit of being late, this will tend to make them so too. On the other hand, never wait for your members ; commence at the time, if there be only one person present ; and seldom continue the service longer than one hour. Incalculable mischief is often done in families, by keeping servants and others, whose relatives are not at all religious, beyond that period. If you have a large number of members, teach them to express themselves in few words, and study brevity in your addresses to them. It is much better to send them away longing than loathing.

It would, likewise, be a decided advantage to prevail upon your members to meet on a week-day, if it can be done, in preference to the sabbath. The sabbath is generally crowded with other means of grace ; and it is impossible for your members to make a right improvement of them and the class likewise. To attempt to do it would be like a man devouring meal after meal, without properly digesting

any. It is not wholesome to do so. Your members, moreover, by meeting on the Sunday, are furnished with the excuse, either for neglecting the preaching of the word for the sake of the class, or the class for the sake of the preaching of the word ; inasmuch as they will tell you they cannot attend to both ; and of this there are some who do not neglect to avail themselves. How often, especially in large towns, are some of our people seen going home, while others are bending their steps to the house of God ! This, to say the least of it, is most unseemly. But, furthermore, meeting on a week-night would be a source of greater benefit to your members. They have numerous opportunities of being stirred up, and quickened, and strengthened, and encouraged on the sabbath ; and very few at other periods when they most need them. Prevail upon them to meet for Christian fellowship between sabbath and sabbath ; and let them, while in the midst of the cares and labours and turmoils of the world, have the opportunity of experiencing a “time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.”

Having said thus much, I now proceed to observe that one special duty connected with



your office is, to get a thorough knowledge of the religious state and condition of all those persons over whom you are appointed to watch. You ought to make an effort to do this, and there ought not to be one case of exception. As a physician in an hospital knows the state of every patient, so you ought to know the spiritual state of all who are under your care. When you know their state, you will be in circumstances to address them in a suitable manner, and not till then. You will doubtless have to listen to details connected with every variety and shade of Christian experience; and it will therefore be necessary for you to exercise a discriminating judgment in the advice which you give. To get this knowledge, and to be able thus to act, will constitute a prime part of your business; and hence I shall venture to offer a few directions for your guidance. You will, in addition to established Christians, whom you must lead on to perfection, have, from time to time, to do with

*The half-awakened.*—Persons who begin “to see men as trees walking” only; but yet have “a desire to flee from the wrath to come,” and to save their souls. Let these be



encouraged ; but be slow to administer comfort to them. Preach the law to them, rather than the gospel. Break them down, rather than build them up. Cause them not only to see, but to feel, the evil of sin, that they may cry mightily to God for deliverance. The “hurt” of many is “healed slightly,” because the consolations of Christ are administered to them before they properly feel the need of them. It is a matter of great importance that all who are under the influence of good desires, should have their repentance well-grounded.

*Mourning penitents*, who cannot rest without the pardoning mercy of God. Teach such persons as these the way of faith as plainly as you can. Hesitate not to place the cross, with “heaven’s sovereign blessings clustering round it,” before them in the clearest light. Bid them turn their eyes to Calvary, and “behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world !” Instruct them how to rely on the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and how to exercise, in connexion with their reliance on Him, “a sure trust and confidence in the mercy of God, that for the sake of Christ their sins are forgiven, and they are re-

conciled to the favour of God." Urge a present salvation upon them. Travail in birth in their behalf until Christ is formed in them. Never be satisfied till you are assured "the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts," and you hear them exclaim, "O Lord, I will praise thee : though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me !"

*Moral persons*, who are stopping short of the enjoyment of saving religion. There are many in our churches who, professedly, have been seekers of salvation for several years. They are, apparently, very sincere ; they are irreproachable in their outward conduct, and regular in their attendance on the means of grace, both divinely instituted and prudential ; and yet they continue unsaved. Take special pains with these. Examine their respective cases ; and be at the trouble of examining them minutely. Find out, if possible, what it is which prevents them from obtaining the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ ; whether it be self-righteousness, or love of the world, or covetousness, or some defect in the understanding, or some "secret bosom sin" in which they indulge. Follow them into all

their lurking-holes and hiding-places, and turn them out. Do not let them remain as they are. Show them, every time you come together, the absolute necessity of being "justified by faith, and having peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Wave all other subjects, and keep them to this. Feel, as it respects them, that it is your only business to get them saved of the Lord.

*The doubting*, who need establishing grace. Most of these are persons "of little faith," and they are ever and anon distressing themselves by calling into question the safety of their condition. Their minds are frequently in a state of suspense and fear, and hence the "consolations of God are small with" them. These persons do not fully embrace Christ. Instruct them how to do so. Try to build them up on their most holy faith. Bid them be of good courage. Teach them how much more good, confidence in God will do them, than distrust. Convince them that He who did not withhold his only Son, will with him freely give them all things. Reason them into a cordial belief of this. Tell them to be afraid of nothing but their own unfaithfulness, and to look more to the Saviour than to them-

selves. Endeavour to establish their goings "in the way everlasting," that they may "run without being weary, and walk without being faint."

*The wavering.*—Some of these are persons who never counted the cost of religion, and who are discouraged because of the difficulties of the way. But, whatever may be the cause of their halting, whether apathy, or companions, or worldly seducements, or otherwise, convince them of the impropriety and sinfulness of looking back. Exhort them to "remember Lot's wife." Show them that nothing but misery, and wrath, and "a fearful looking for of judgment," and hell, await them, if they pursue a retrograde movement; and that, however they who fear not God may persuade, and sinful pleasures allure, the path of duty is the only path of safety; and that, by walking in it, they will have more happiness in this world than they possibly can have by following any other course; and, in addition to this, will have a cheering prospect of "glory and honour and immortality, eternal life," in the world which is to come. Labour to bring them to a right and speedy decision. They will do nothing to purpose in religion, until

they are altogether on the Lord's side, both in heart and life. Do not let them go. Count your services lost, unless you succeed in keeping them "in the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."

*The insincere*, or, to use another word, *hypocrites*.—Those who have assumed a profession of religion under the influence of sinister motives. For, strange as it may appear, there are some such persons in every section of the Christian church, where the members are numerous. Some put on the garb of religion merely as a matter of respectability, others to succeed in business, others as an introduction to matrimony, and others to obtain pecuniary assistance. Now, although it would be highly improper and culpable in you to suspect any one of insincerity without sufficient ground for so doing, yet where there is sufficient and indisputable ground for suspicion, be upon your guard. Keep your eye upon all such persons. Watch them narrowly. Ascertain their real character; and if you be not satisfied, tell them plainly, in private, what you think. Unscathe them; and, as the saying is, make the place too hot for them. If there be no prospect of their con-

version to God, the sooner you get quit of them the better ; for they will do more harm than good. They will be like so many Achans in the camp.

*The tempted.*—All the people of God are the subjects of temptation ; but there are some who are peculiarly so. They are frequently so buffeted by Satan, and the contest is so protracted, that they are brought into heaviness, and are greatly discouraged. Let these have your special attention. Render them all the assistance in your power. Strengthen their hands in the Lord. Remind them of the temptations of Job, and others ; and of their steadfastness and deliverance. Bring to their remembrance the sayings of God to such as they are : “ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man ; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (1 Cor. x. 13.) Exhort them to take the whole armour of God, and to fight and conquer ; and to be assured that He who “ knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation,” will deliver them. Set before

them the example of Christ, "who was tempted in all points as we are, and yet without sin." Comfort them with the consideration that the Saviour intercedes for them; and that although Satan may desire to have them that he may sift them as wheat, yet He prays that their faith may not fail. Encourage them to sing,—

"Ten thousand snares my path beset;  
Yet will I, Lord, the work complete,  
Which thou to me hast given;  
Regardless of the pains I feel,  
Close by the gates of death and hell,  
I urge my way to heaven."

*Backsliders in heart.*—These are a class of persons who have suffered either "the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eye, or the pride of life," to eat the vitals of religion out of their souls; and although they still have "the form of godliness," they are destitute of the power; and in some cases there may be strong indications that they are in danger of drawing "back to perdition." Try to recover all of this description. If possible, suffer them to go no farther in the direction in which they are proceeding. Ply them with promises, and ply them with threatenings.



Have recourse to all the methods you think will be likely to restore them to spiritual health and soundness. Impress them with the awful consequences of apostasy; that if they should miss of heaven they will have much sorer punishment, because of having "trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they were sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace;" (Heb. x. 29;) and thus get them to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die," and to "repent and do their first works." Discover, if you can, the first symptoms of religious declension, in every case, and be anxious to stop it in its commencement. Whenever any of your members begin to neglect the public means of grace, or to seek for excuses for so doing, or whenever they are seen habitually associating with the people of the world, or losing their regard for the holy sabbath, be jealous over them with a godly jealousy. You may be satisfied all is not right, and act accordingly.

*Neglecters of family duties.*—Ascertain whether any of the members of your class, who are heads of families, neglect to assemble

their household, for the purpose of reading the scripture and prayer. If any of them do, urge attendance to this duty upon them. Show them the reasonableness, and the propriety, and the benefit, direct and indirect, of so doing. Allow of no excuse. If the husband, because of the nature of his worldly avocations, cannot always conduct family worship, let the wife, if she be a devout, God-fearing woman, act as his representative. If any plead the want of gifts, if they state they cannot pray in public extemporaneously, then recommend them to use a form. It would be better for them to read a form of prayer, than to have no family-prayer at all. Tell them they cannot expect to have the blessing of Heaven, unless they thus act, and “command their household” after them. For the sake of their children and domestics, and the credit of religion, as well as for the sake of their own reputation, see that a family-altar is erected in the houses of all under your care.

*Young persons, and young converts.*—Both these classes of persons, like tender plants, will require great attention. Watch over them with diligence. Study the character of the young who may meet with you, and as-

certain from what quarter they are most exposed to danger, and throw a moral barrier round them to protect them. Treat them as the lambs of Christ's flock. Teach them how to watch over their own hearts, and to guard against the seducing influence of the world. Exhort them to read their Bibles prayerfully, and to take heed unto their ways, according to God's word. As their minds are flexible and elastic, mould their piety well. Form it for usefulness. Instruct them, and new converts also, in the wiles of Satan, and urge them to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation. Feed them "with milk rather than strong meat; for as yet they will not be able to bear it." As they are continually beset with numerous adversaries, do not let them, through any negligence or omission of yours, become a prey. Let it be your constant endeavour to strengthen and encourage them, and to keep them from falling, that they may "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things," and be serviceable members of the church.

*Those who are troubled on account of the poverty of their circumstances.*—Many of the pious poor, through a variety of causes, are brought, occasionally, into straits and difficulties; so

much so, that they scarcely know what to do, or what course to pursue. Their way seems to be completely hedged up. The designs of God respecting them are surrounded with darkness. They “go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but they cannot perceive him: on the left hand where he doth work, but they cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that they cannot see him;” (Job xxiii. 8, 9;) and, as a consequence, they are much cast down, and are greatly distressed. These will need much sympathy. Let them have it; and let them see you feel interested in their welfare. Speak comfortably to them, and instruct them to put their confidence in God; to “trust, and not be afraid;” and to be anxiously “careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make known their requests unto God.” Point out to them that their circumstances are not worse, nay, are not so bad as were those of the blessed Saviour when he exclaimed, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Rehearse to them the sayings of Christ to his distrusting disciples: “Be-

hold the fowls of the air : for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they ? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow : they toil not, neither do they spin ; and yet, I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith ?" (Matt. vi. 26—30.) Assure them, that as they have sought first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, all these things (food and raiment) shall be added ; (Matt. vi. 33 ;) that "no good thing shall be withheld from them that walk uprightly ;" and that they have promise of the life which now is, as well as of that which is to come, and the promise will certainly be fulfilled.

*The members who absent themselves from class will also require your care.*—Never forget it is one part of your duty to see every member of your class once a week. This you are virtually bound to do, according to rule, by having taken office, and you cannot excuse yourself from it. It may be, that

some of your members are so situated that you cannot have access to them, or you may be so circumstanced that you cannot always attend to this part of your duty yourself; but if it be so, you may do it by proxy. It is most probable that there are some faithful, spiritually-minded, zealous persons, both male and female, in your class, who would gladly help you in this department of service. If it be necessary, do not neglect to avail yourself of their assistance. In the general, however, if you were so determined,—and you ought to be,—you might see the absent members in person. There is much truth in the old adage, “Where there is a will, there is a way.” In many instances where Leaders neglect their absentees, we fear the will is wanting. To my certain knowledge, there are many Leaders who never go after their absent members; or if they do, it is very, very seldom. If their members come to class, well; and if they do not, there is no concern manifested. I have known several instances of members having been absent from class for a quarter of a year in succession; and when the minister at the quarterly visitation has asked the reason of this, the Leader has not been able to give



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one, and has reluctantly acknowledged that he has had no interview with the parties during this period. Such Leaders, I hesitate not to affirm, have lost the spirit of their office. The loss which the Methodist Connexion sustains from this cause alone is incalculable. Many, through a variety of causes, become careless and negligent, or they fall into temptation, or they get a little involved in their temporal circumstances, and become remiss in their attention to Christian communion, and, because they are not sought after, they go back again into the world, and have no more place among us. Hundreds, if not thousands, of members are sacrificed annually, because they are not visited when they begin to absent themselves from class. You, as a Leader, ought to feel this, and ought to ask, "Am I implicated? Have any been lost through my negligence?" I admit you are much engaged in your worldly calling, and have but little time which you can devote to this purpose; but, notwithstanding this, you might, if you were so disposed, so arrange matters as to see all the members to whom you can have access, according to rule. And here, allow me to ask, Do you not spend more time

(perhaps much more time) every week in ease, and self-indulgence, or in trifling, or in doing nothing, than it would take to visit the absent members of your class? Does not your neglect more frequently arise from want of disposition, or want of zeal, or want of love to souls, than want of time? Have you not very often an uneasy mind respecting this? Does not conscience frequently reprove and condemn you? And might not these inward conflicts and painful feelings be brought to an end by taking up your cross, and doing that which would tend greatly to promote the good of souls, the welfare of the church, and the glory of God, by going to see your members, when your members do not come to see you? Be no party to the loss of the Connexion, and the declension of the church!

*The sick ought to have your special attention.*—And how do you know, unless you have made inquiry, but those of your members who do not come to class as usual, are sick? In many instances the absence of members arises from sickness. And in seasons of affliction, whether personal or domestic, the people of your charge will need additional comfort and encouragement; and they will, as a matter of

course, expect to see you. Never let them be disappointed. Never let them have to complain, and say, "I have been ill, confined to my bed or house, for some weeks, and my Leader has never visited me." Go to them when they are afflicted, and if they are broken, try to bind them up; and if they are distressed, comfort them; and if they are beset by the enemy of souls, endeavour to break the snare; and pray for them that they may be healed. Remember it is written, "The prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." (James v. 15.) Let them so share in your sympathies, as to be afflicted, in some degree, like the Saviour, in all their afflictions.

And here let me observe, it devolves upon you, *not only to keep together the number of members which you have, but to increase their number.*—The increase or decrease of members in our churches does not altogether depend upon the success of the word, as ministered by the servants of Christ: it depends much, very much, on the activity and efficiency of Class-Leaders. For, there are numbers, however they may be impressed under the word, who

never think of meeting in class, and joining the church, until they are invited to do so. Some seriously-disposed persons wait for an invitation for years, and do not get one. This, in a great measure, is the fault of Class-Leaders, or members. You ought to acquire the habit of observing the effects of the gospel on those who are not connected with the church, and of looking after those who appear to feel under it; and you should say to them, "We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." (Num. x. 20.) I am persuaded you could not pursue this course without having your efforts crowned with success. How is it that some Leaders are constantly increasing the number of their members, and that their classes have so frequently to be divided? The reason is plain: They live in the spirit of their office. When they go to the house of God, they observe persons who appear to be affected, and make inquiries respecting them. They try to persuade those whom they find to be religiously disposed, to save their souls, and find their way to heaven. They are bent upon

enlarging the borders of Zion, and getting her converts multiplied. They cannot, they will not, be satisfied without it: and this is the secret of their prosperity. And, on the other hand, how is it that there are Leaders, many of them gifted, good men, who scarcely ever get an increase to their classes; nay, cannot keep the members whom they have? The cause of this is likewise obvious enough. They never bestir themselves. They never move a step out of the way to bring a soul to Christ, to God, to heaven. If any of the members under their care die, or are removed, or apostatize, they make no effort to fill up the vacancies which are occasioned. They never seek those who appear to be lost, and never drive back those who have strayed. Such Leaders as these, we fear, are "at ease in Zion," or they have "lost their first love," or (if they ever possessed it) the spirit of their office. At least they have not that Christian zeal and enterprise by which they ought to be characterized. All Leaders ought to consider themselves as so many recruiting officers in the service of the King of kings, and Lord of lords; and ought to be resolutely determined, in the strength of grace, to swell the ranks of

the Captain of our salvation with persons called and chosen ; and to think no self-denial too great to practise, no cross too heavy to take up, no sacrifice too costly to make, and no difficulty too great to surmount, that this may be effected. O, if all the Leaders in the Wesleyan-Methodist Connexion were heartily and zealously to co-operate with their Ministers, through the length and breadth of the land, in endeavouring to bring persons wrought upon by a preached gospel within the pale of the church, the most high God would soon make us, as a people, a thousand-fold more than we are, and bless us as he has promised ! We should then hear no more respecting decrease ! The mouths of our enemies would be stopped, and their heads would be hidden !

Yours, &c.

## LETTER VI.

ON THE DUTIES OF A CLASS-LEADER, AS IT RESPECTS THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS OF THE CONNEXION, HIS BRETHREN IN OFFICE, THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD, AND THE MEETING, OF WHICH, BY VIRTUE OF HIS OFFICE, HE IS A MEMBER.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I shall now proceed to notice the financial department of your duty. And, although this is a matter of secondary consideration, yet it is one of great moment; inasmuch as the affairs of the church cannot be managed and conducted without money. It is an unspeakable advantage to a church to be free from pecuniary difficulties; and, on the other hand, financial embarrassment is the source of innumerable evils. It has a withering, blighting influence, on the minds both of ministers and people. It is felt by the congregation, as well as the church; and it acts as a drag-wheel on every movement, which has for its object the extension of the cause of God



and truth. If, therefore, you feel interested in the welfare of the church, you will do what you can to promote its temporal, as well as its spiritual, prosperity.

According to our connexional regulations, the members of your class are expected, on the voluntary principle, to contribute, as they have ability, to the support of the regular ministry, to the spread of the gospel in our own country, and to help to eke out the scanty pittance of worn-out Ministers, widows of Ministers, and their children.

The weekly and quarterly contributions in your class are devoted to the first of these objects; the donations at the March visitation are devoted to the second; and the subscriptions which are solicited in September, to the third.

Now as to the first of these,—the support of the regular ministry. “Our original rule,” says Mr. Wesley, “was, Every member contributes one penny weekly, unless he is in extreme poverty, and one shilling quarterly;” (this was the *minimum*;) moreover, he says, “Let every Leader receive the weekly contribution from each person in his class.”\* And

\* See Minutes of Conference for 1782.

in the Rules of Society, a copy of which ought to be in the hands of every member, among other things, it is stated to be your "business to see each person" in your class "once a week, to see what they are willing" (not compelled) "to give toward the support of the gospel." \* You are expected to attend to this rule, and to show to your people (especially to new members) the reasonableness of helping to support that ministry by which they have been, and are, so greatly benefited. Instruct them that the Lord hath "ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel;" (1 Cor. ix. 14;) that "the workman is worthy of his meat," (Matt. x. 10,) and "the labourer of his hire;" (Luke x. 7;) that they "who are taught in the word" are bound by God "to communicate to him that teacheth in all good things" requisite to supply his temporal necessities; (Gal. vi. 6;) and that if ministers "sow unto them spiritual things," it is no "great thing" if they should "reap their carnal things." (1 Cor. x. 11.) It is true the management of this matter will require a little wisdom and prudence;

\* See the Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists, p. 1.

but let no motives of false delicacy induce you to neglect it. If the hearts of those who meet with you be right, and their intentions sincere, they will, according to their power, cheerfully take their share of the common burden; and if they be otherwise, such members are neither worth having nor keeping. Try also, by all means, to get your members to pay their contributions weekly. Prevail upon your more wealthy members to set an example to the others, in this respect. To allow your members who are poor to be for a succession of weeks without giving their pence, is to place them (unless they have much piety) in the way of powerful temptation, either to neglect coming to class, or to cease meeting altogether. Never allow them, if possible, to be placed in these circumstances. It is like furnishing Satan with a weapon to use to their hurt. It is bad policy so to do. To give a penny will seldom be felt to be a burden to them; but to have to give more will be so occasionally. And take care that you, as a Leader, do not entertain any mistaken notions respecting the contributions of your members. If the Bible be true, to contribute to the support of their ministers is a direct benefit to them. It is a

source of present and future good. Never be the subject of any misplaced sympathy as it regards this. Remember the case of "the poor widow," who cast into the treasury "all that she had, even all her living." (Mark xii. 41.) Did the Saviour censure her for so doing? Did he say she ought to have kept it for her own necessities? No! He testified his approbation by passing the highest eulogy on her, by declaring she had done more than all her rich neighbours. And do not forget that the very poor, in the general, receive more from our charitable funds, than they contribute for the maintenance of their ministers; and that they are in reality gainers, in a worldly point of view, by being members of the church.\*

\* In the Minutes of Conference for 1782, in which Conference Mr. Wesley presided, there is the following question:—"Q. 32. The scripture says, 'If any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, with such an one, no, not to eat. And put away from among yourselves that wicked person.' This is an express command, and it is of unspeakable importance. These *money-lovers* are the pest of every society. They have been the main cause of destroying every revival of religion. They will destroy *us*, if we do not put them away. But how shall

As it respects the second object for which your members contribute; namely, the spread of the gospel in our own country, the subscription for which is made in the month of March, and which may, with propriety, be designated, "The Home Missionary Collection:" this is one of the oldest collections in Methodism. It was first formally appointed by the Conference in 1749.\* "Prior to this time, it had been adopted by a few of the societies, and afterwards it was earnestly recommended to all of them." At that early

we know them, without the miraculous discernment of spirits?

"A. 1.—By their own confession. Tell any one alone, with all tenderness, 'I am to give an account of your soul to God. Enable me to do it with joy. I am afraid you are covetous. Answer me a few questions in order to remove that fear.' 2.—By their fruits. For instance: A man not worth a shilling enters our society. Yet he freely gives a penny a week. Five years after he is worth scores of pounds. He gives a penny a week still. I must think this man covetous, unless he assures me he bestows his charity some other way. For every one is covetous whose beneficence does not increase in the same proportion as his substance." (Vol. i. p. 102.)

\* Mr. Grindrod, in his *Compendium*, says 1756; but this is a mistake. See *Minutes of Conference*, 8vo. vol. i. p. 43.

period it was applied to the following objects : the liquidation of the debts on the preaching-houses which had been already built ; to provide means for calling out an additional number of Travelling Preachers ; to meet the deficiencies of those preachers who were stationed in the poorer Circuits, in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland ; and to enable the preachers to defray certain law expenses, which in those days they were compelled to incur, in order to obtain protection from persecuting mobs. In recommendation of this subscription, the superintendents were directed to read in every society the following hints, enlarging upon them as they might think proper.\*

These statements, made by Mr. Grindrod, are drawn from the original address, contained in the Minutes of Conference for 1749. The "hints" are taken from the "Large Minutes," as they are designated; and it is from these that we shall quote them. They are in substance the same as those contained in the "Minutes" of 1749:—

"How," it is asked, "shall we send labour-

\* Grindrod's Compendium, part iv. chap. xii. sect. i., pp. 284, 285.

ers into those parts where they are the most of all wanted? (Suppose the north of Ireland, and the north of Scotland, Wales, and many parts of England.) Many are willing to hear, but not to bear the expense. Nor can it as yet be expected of them. Stay till the word of God hath touched their hearts, and then they will gladly provide for them that preach it. Does it not lie upon us, in the meantime, to supply their lack of service; to raise a general fund, out of which, from time to time, that expense may be defrayed? By this means, those who willingly offer themselves may travel in every part, and stay where there is a call, and stay without being burdensome to any. Thus may the gospel, in the life and power thereof, be spread from sea to sea. Which of you will not rejoice to throw in your mite, to promote this glorious work?

“ Besides this, in carrying on so large a work, through the three kingdoms, there are calls for money in various ways, and we must frequently be at considerable expense, or the work must be at full stop. Many, too, are the occasional distresses of our preachers, or their families, which require an immediate supply. Otherwise their hands would hang down, if they



were not constrained to depart from the work.

“Let, then, every member of our society once a year set his shoulder to the work ; contributing more or less, as God hath prospered him, at the Lady-day visitation of the classes. Let none be excluded from giving something, be it a penny, a half-penny, a farthing. Remember the widow's two mites. And let those who are able to give shillings, crowns, and pounds, do it willingly. The money contributed will be brought to the ensuing Conference.

“Men and brethren, help ! Was there ever a call like this since you first heard the gospel sound ? Help to relieve your companions in the kingdom of Jesus, who are pressed above measure.

“ ‘Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of the Lord.’ Help to send forth able and willing labourers into your Lord's harvest ; so shall ye be assistant in saving souls from death, and hiding a multitude of sins. Help to spread the gospel of your salvation into the remotest corners of the kingdom, till ‘the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the land, as the waters do the sea ;’ so

shall it appear to ourselves and all men, that we are indeed one body, united by one Spirit ; so shall the baptized Heathen be yet again constrained to say, ‘ See how these Christians love one another.’ In this way do not even Romanists provoke us to jealousy ? They have a general fund at Rome, and another at Paris, which bear all the expenses of their missionaries throughout the world.”\*

Such are the words of the venerable Wesley, on this subject ; and in them, “ he being dead yet speaketh.” In 1815 the Conference enacted, that “ an annual public collection for the spread of the gospel at home, shall be made in all our congregations throughout the kingdom in the early part of the month of July,† and applied in aid of the old established

\* Wesley’s Works, 3d. ed. 8vo. vol. viii. pp. 335, 336.

† See the Minutes of Conference for 1815, vol. iv. 8vo. p. 127. These two collections are supplemented annually by a large grant from the profits of the Book-Room, and the amount of the whole forms the Contingent Fund. From this fund two hundred circuits in England, Scotland, and Wales, derived assistance in 1847 ; the sums received by them varying in amount from £4. to £158. And were it not for the help thus afforded, they would not be able to retain their present staff of ministers.

yearly collection, which is made privately in the classes."

Having thus put this case fairly before you, let me exhort you to interest your class in this business, and do not act as if you felt no concern in a matter of so much importance. Read the printed circular which you receive respecting it to them ; and prepare them to contribute, as they are able, at the time appointed. Leave not the whole of this matter to your ministers ; let them have to do as little as possible with the financial concerns of your class. It may be, your members, in contributing to this fund, are only contributing to help themselves. Probably the circuit in which you reside receives much more in the form of a grant from the Contingent Fund, than it contributes towards its support. If it do, remind your members of it ; and if it do not, set before them the noble example of the primitive Christians, who administered to the necessities of the apostles and their co-adjutors, while they were dispensing the word of life to other churches. Thus the Philippians administered to the necessities of Paul when he was at Thessalonica : " Even in Thessalonica," says he, " ye sent once and

again unto my necessities." (Phil. iv. 16.) And to the Corinthians, he says, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man; for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied." (2 Cor. xi. 8, 9.)

The last object to which the members of your class (as members) are expected to contribute, is the Fund for Worn-out Ministers, ministers' widows, and their children. This fund was established during the memorable Centenary year of Wesleyan Methodism. It originated with some of the lay gentlemen of the Connexion. "It would appear," as it is stated in one of the Centenary documents, "that the exact situation of ministers in the Wesleyan Connexion, when worn out with service, or obliged to retire from the regular work of the ministry through the loss of health, and of the widows and orphan children of deceased preachers, when bereaved by death of their husbands and parents, has not till lately been well understood by the body of Wesleyan Methodists and their friends at large; nor, indeed, by any considerable number of

that body. It was not generally known that there is no fund at present *raised by the contributions of the members of our societies and congregations*, upon which these persons have any *claim*, and from which they may receive, as a *matter of course*, some stated allowance when they are cut off from *every Circuit Fund* in the Connexion. In this respect the situation of a Methodist minister is peculiar and trying. He may have journeyed, and preached, and worn himself out in strenuous endeavours to promote the temporal, the spiritual, and the eternal welfare of the people to whose service he has devoted his life, never in any place receiving more pecuniary remuneration for his labours than is sufficient for the present respectable and comfortable maintenance of himself and family ; and then, as soon as the Conference declares him no longer competent to the labours of a circuit, and places him in the class of supernumerary preachers, he has to begin the world ; he has not so much as a habitation to shelter him from the wind and the rain ; his people have made no provision for his subsistence ; and all that he can claim from any fund *provided by the Connexion*, is *twenty*, or at most *thirty*, pounds, towards

furnishing the house to which he retires, with a worn-out or broken constitution, to suffer and to die. The only exception is the very limited assistance afforded from what is now usually termed the Auxiliary Fund, to a *small class* of the *most aged* supernumeraries. A preacher's widow is in a still more destitute condition." \* Such was the state of things as it respects this, previous to the Centenary year. To remedy this crying evil, and to wipe away this reproach, it was then proposed that a fund should be raised, "on the same principle as the Children's Fund," and "*that each individual circuit should be held responsible for raising within itself its fair quota of the whole sum annually required, in proportion to its number of members in society, from year to year.*" † And it was calculated, that "*a general contribution from the members of six-pence each per annum,*" would be sufficient to do this, if supplemented by the subscriptions of the more wealthy, given, as heretofore, in the month of June. And here I may be permitted to say, an object like this "commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." What

\* GRINDROD'S "Compendium," pp. 439, 440.

† *Ibid*, pp. 329, 330.



can be more just, than that some provision should be made for your ministers, when, through sickness or old age, they are no longer capable of discharging their regular duties? The church, during the period they are capable of labour, only gives them what is requisite to supply their present necessities; and, therefore, they cannot lay up in store against the decline of life; and many of them have but little or no private property: what, then, is to become of them when their health and strength fail, if there be no fund from which they can obtain assistance? Are they to be left to breathe out a miserable existence—when, perhaps, they require additional comfort and support—in a state bordering on starvation? Every principle and feeling of our holy religion say, No! These men sacrificed all their worldly prospects (and the prospects of many of them were good) in early life, *at the call*, and for the service, of the church; and common honesty, leaving every thing nobler in Christianity out of the question, ought to lead those who have been benefited by their ministry, to take care that they do not lack the necessaries, not to say the comforts, of life, when they are laid aside by sickness or old age. The amount



required from each individual to preserve them from this state of things is so small, that, taking the object contemplated into consideration, all reasonable persons would conclude, that every member, unless extremely poor indeed, would think it a privilege to contribute his quota, and would do it with pleasure. *Sixpence per year to preserve infirm and aged ministers, ministers' widows, and fatherless children from destitution.* Is this too large a sum? Is this a sacrifice too great to make for such a purpose? Can a man have "the love of God in him" who "shuts his bowels of compassion," and withholds his contribution? Nay; can he be a just man who does? Wesleyan ministers enter into the service of the Connexion with the expectation, that bread to eat, and raiment to put on, at least, will be provided for them; and they have a right to expect, if they continue in active service till worn out, that these will, to a certain extent, be provided for them to the end of their pilgrimage.

You, as a Leader, I am sure, will see the propriety and the necessity of this; and, therefore, will feel it to be your duty to co-operate in endeavouring to prevail upon the members of

your class to do their part in this work of Christian justice and beneficence. If some of your members be too poor to spare sixpence at once, either pass them by, or instruct them how to meet the case, by the contribution of *a half-penny a month*. It will be an everlasting disgrace to the Methodist Connexion, if the measure recently proposed be not carried into effect. Do all you can to prevent such a scandal. Much, very much, depends upon your exertions, and the exertions of your colleagues in office. If you and they feel no interest in this question, it is to be expected your members will not; if you care not what becomes of the ministers of Christ, who have been accustomed to feed your souls with the everlasting truth of God, when they are past service, it is not likely they will; but if they see you feel concerned, they will drink into your spirit, and do what is required of them with a ready mind and cheerful heart. Only bring the case fairly before them, and kindly ask for their assistance, and the fund will be "a memorial to all generations."

And now, while I am dwelling on pecuniary matters, as you are from time to time mixed up with the financial affairs of the church,

presses burst out with new wine." (Prov. iii. 9, 10.) Now, I ask, who does this? Where are the men who "honour the Lord," both with their "substance" and "the first-fruits of all their increase?" If it were believed that, were they to do so, their "barns would be filled with plenty, and their presses burst with new wine," in other words, they would have great temporal prosperity, would not many do so who do not? They do not, therefore, because of unbelief.

"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." (Prov. xi. 24.) Who believes this? Would not many "scatter" much more than they are accustomed to do, if they believed they should increase by so doing? And would many "withhold" in the manner they oftentimes do, if they believed it tended to poverty? And yet God says it does; they do not, therefore, believe God.

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." (Luke vi. 38.) Now if Christians cordially believed that what they give would be returned in this "measure," would

there be the nipping, and screwing, and grudging, and hardening of heart, and closing of bowels of compassion, which are frequently practised by many, when they are appealed to in behalf of the cause of God and the poor? We trow not.

“Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts xx. 35.) Again I ask, Who believes this? Do not many act as if the converse of this were the doctrine of the Lord Jesus? They believe it is blessed to receive; but so far from believing “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” they scarcely believe it is at all blessed to give. They would sooner almost do any thing than give. They seldom do it except it be “grudgingly, or of necessity;” it is seldom done of “a ready mind.”

“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” (2 Cor. ix. 6.) Who gives credence to this? Do not numbers sow as “sparingly” as they well can? From the small quantity of seed which they scatter, it may be inferred they do not expect to receive much harvest; for the Lord Jehovah declares, every man’s return shall be in pro-

portion to the seed which he sows. If this were believed as it ought to be, would not some sow more "bounteously" than they do? \*

It is clear that many professing Christians need information on the doctrine of stewardship, and the right use of their gifts and property, whether little or much, great or small. Give instruction to those under your care in these things. Teach them to be liberal according to their ability; and tell them, as Paul did the Corinthians, "that God is able to," and therefore will, "make all grace to abound toward them; that they, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness which causeth through us thanksgiving to God." (2 Cor. ix. 8, 11.)

But I must return from this short digression, to notice some other branches of your duty; and I shall begin with those which re-

\* These observations are not intended to apply to many of the pious poor in our Connexion; for we bear them record, that "their deep poverty abounds unto the riches of their liberality;" for they frequently not only do to the extent of their power, but "beyond their power."

late to your brethren in office. As it respects these, act in union with them; and cultivate feelings of brotherly kindness towards them. Be kind and condescending. Avoid every thing in the form of envy and jealousy. Rejoice in the prosperity of your colleagues in office. If you are successful in increasing the number of your members, try to help those who are not. Recommend a system of reciprocity, and endeavour to make an arrangement that you may occasionally meet each other's classes.\* And as all are not equally gifted,—as some are peculiarly qualified for usefulness,—invite those whose labours have been signally blessed, now and then, to visit you, that your members may be stirred up and quickened through their instrumentality. Do not be afraid of losing your members by so doing. Let their good always be the all-absorbing consideration. If a spirit of party should at any time be manifested, do not par-

\* This practice is recommended in the Minutes of Conference for 1744, where it is said, "Let the Leaders frequently meet each other's classes. Let us observe which Leaders are the most useful; and let these meet the other classes as often as possible."—Wesley's Works, vol. viii. 3d ed. 8vo. p. 301.



ticipate in it ; check it ; scout it ; chase it out of existence. Ever consider a party-spirit to be the bane of a Christian society, generating confusion and every evil work.

As it respects *your ministers*, never forget you are their assistants, being appointed to help them in the discharge of their pastoral duties. Always bear in mind that you are bound to be faithful to your trust. Never increase, but always, if possible, lighten, their burdens. Let your connexion with them never be a source of pain, but of pleasure, to them. Never be the source of annoyance to them. Let them find you uniformly attentive and obliging ; and, as you know they have the care of all the Circuit in which you reside, make sacrifices, and practise self-denial, to do them service. Stand by them in every emergency. Strengthen their hands in the Lord. Be exceedingly tender and jealous of their character. Let no attack upon their reputation be undefended. Vindicate them, from the conviction that when the character of ministers is undermined, their power of usefulness is taken away. Endeavour to raise them in the estimation of your class. Love them as the servants, and for the sake, of their crucified



Master ; and, whatever may be their peculiarities, or infirmities, or defects, “esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake.” This is an obligation from which nothing can release you. “Obey them” also as those that “have the rule over you ; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

And then with regard to the meetings, called *Leaders’ Meetings*, at which all the business of that section of the church in which you are an office-bearer, is transacted. Remember the rules require you “to meet the ministers and stewards of the society *once a week*, in order to inform the ministers of any who are sick, or of any who walk disorderly and will not be reprov’d ; to pay the stewards what you have received from your class the week preceding ; and to show your account of what each person has contributed.”\* Be conscientious in conforming to this. The affairs of the church never prosper so well, as when Leaders’ meetings are regularly held and duly attended. Whenever, therefore, you can, although it may be a great inconvenience so to do, go to the Leaders’ meeting. And if

\* See “The Rules of the Society of the People called Methodists,” p. 1.

you have any members who are very destitute, represent their cases, and get them some relief from the poor's fund ; and if you have any who are sick, give their names and places of abode to the minister who presides, and request him to visit them, taking care that his visits do not supersede, but be in addition to, your own ; and if you have any members who have absented themselves from class for a succession of weeks without a sufficient cause, prevail upon the presiding minister to visit them likewise. A Leaders' meeting is the proper channel of communication with your ministers, as it respects all such matters, except in cases of emergency ; and hence their importance. Never let a member who may be in a declining state of grace, or who may be sick, be unvisited by a minister through your negligence. Unspeakable mischief is often the result of such negligence, and you are to blame in every case where it is so. When a Leader habitually absents himself from the representative meeting of the church of which he is an officer, his members cannot be cared for as they ought to be. If you should have no special business which requires your attendance at such meeting, go : go, be-

cause the rule requires you should, and pay the contributions of your class, whether the amount be little or much ; go, for the sake of order, and as an example to your brethren ; go, to cheer and encourage your ministers ; and go, to show you feel an interest in the prosperity of the cause of the Saviour of the world. No Leader can feel anxiously desirous for the welfare of the church, who neglects meeting with his brethren from week to week, if it be possible for him to assemble with them. It may be taken for granted that there is something either essentially defective, or radically wrong, in the Leader who does this. It is clear that the business of the church is only of secondary importance with him. Never let this be your case. Get your mind deeply impressed with the fact, that *the business of the church is the business of the Lord Jesus Christ, and is secondary in importance to no business in the universe.* The heart of no professing Christian, be he Leader or otherwise, can be right, who does not feel this, and act accordingly. Being satisfied, then, that all church business is of primary importance, let it have your first and best attention.

When you are with your brethren in the

Leaders' meeting, conduct yourself with the greatest propriety and decorum. Be an example to them in spirit, and temper, and feeling. Be courteous. Never use improper or unbecoming language. Avoid every thing coarse and rude. Let your attention be directed to the proper business of the meeting. Never introduce subjects foreign to it, and over which the meeting has no jurisdiction. Attempt no innovations. There are some mistaken brethren, who endeavour to drag into Leaders' meetings things which they never were intended to include or comprehend. Do not imitate such. Adopt the conversational style in all you have to say. Avoid every thing in the form of speech-making or declamation, in order to make yourself appear of importance. A declaimer, or speech-maker, in a Leaders' meeting is a nuisance. Shun such an one, and choose none of his ways. Persons of this class have often been mischief-makers, and have done incalculable harm to the church of God. They have, in many instances, not only created breezes, but storms and tempests. Always act as in the presence of God; and with singleness of eye seek his glory in all things; and then you will know

how to behave yourself in “the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth.” (1 Tim. iii. 15.)

Yours, &c.

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## LETTER VII.

ON THE DIFFICULTIES WITH WHICH A  
CLASS-LEADER HAS TO CONTEND.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—I do not wish you to suppose the office which you hold has no difficulties connected with it. If you entertain such an idea, you will be disappointed. Difficulties of some kind attend every office and station in life. Ministers of religion, philosophers, statesmen, physicians, lawyers, and mechanics, all have their difficulties. The world abounds with them. There is no such thing as a smooth sea, or a stream with an unrippled surface, in this state of being. And so long as you have to do with human nature, partly sanctified only, whether it be in yourself or others, it cannot be but you will meet with things which will exercise and try

you. Be prepared for these : and be willing, in the discharge of your duties, to brave the wind, and breast the flood.

You will, no doubt, as you pass along the path marked out for you, meet with numerous discouragements ; and these will proceed from a variety of sources. You will, for instance, be subject to manifold temptations, originating in your office. Satan generally adapts his temptations to the states and circumstances of those whom he assaults ; and you must not expect to escape. He knows you are endeavouring to do good, and he will try, if possible, to prevent you. You will probably be tempted, not unfrequently, to think you are not qualified for the station which you occupy ; and that you would be more in your place, and be more comfortable, if you were a private member. I advise you never to trouble yourself about this. Leave this to others. You are not a proper judge in your own case. You have been appointed to your present charge, by the nomination of one of your ministers, and the suffrages of your brethren : acquiesce in their decision, and to the best of your ability acquit yourself like a man. Duty, not choice, is yours. Why should you reason

yourself into an uncomfortable state of mind about doing the will of the church, which you ought to conclude is the will of God? There can be no wisdom in so doing.

You will probably, now and then, feel cold and barren, and be disposed to say, "How unfit I am for the work which devolves upon me! How can I, who am so cold myself, be the means of communicating spiritual warmth to others? It would be better for me to relinquish my charge." Never indulge in thoughts of this description. Admitting that you feel as described, it would be no just cause for abandoning the post assigned to you. It is your duty, by all the means in your power, to guard against this state, and not allow your love and zeal to decline; but yet, if at any time you feel you have been robbed of unction, and power, and life, so much so, that you have little of the heart of religion left, let the consideration of the important office you sustain induce you to seek for the quickening influences of the Holy Ghost, and to get refreshed like a giant with new wine. Never forget that a throne of grace is accessible, and that you may obtain in every time of need a rich and an abundant supply of the



invigorating influences of the Spirit of Christ.

It is very likely that sometimes, when you are about to meet your class, you will be disturbed by some such thoughts as these: "I feel as if I cannot say any thing to my members, much more any thing to profit them. I am afraid I shall be shut up and confounded before them." Whenever this is the case, notwithstanding you thus feel, go, and make the attempt, relying on the Holy Spirit for assistance, and he will "open to you a door of utterance." On all occasions when you are thus circumstanced, call to mind former times. Have you not often felt so? Have you not frequently gone to your class, thinking that you had not a "portion of meat" to give to any one who might be present? And has not God, when you have gone prayerfully depending upon him, helped you in that self-same hour, and given you "a mouth and wisdom," so that you have been able to speak, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth," but in words "which the Holy Ghost teacheth," with a power and a propriety which have been a source of surprise to yourself, and of blessing to others? Call these seasons to remembrance

whenever you are assailed from this quarter, and be encouraged by the recollection of them. He who thus “helped your infirmities,” is without variableness or shadow of turning. The assistance which he has afforded in times past, he will afford in the time to come : only trust in Him, and you will never be confounded.

It is not unlikely, moreover, that a train of thoughts something like the following, will occasionally become a source of annoyance to you : “I can say nothing to my members which I have not said before ; there is no point of experience on which I have not dwelt, no species of temptation of which I have not spoken, no kind of trial concerning which I have not given advice. I shall be necessitated to repeat what I have often stated to them, and I am afraid I shall weary them.” Should it be so, do not let even this dishearten you ; on the contrary, try to derive good from it. Let it be the means of stimulating you to the acquisition of knowledge, and to the improvement of your qualifications. And as there are some great and leading truths which you must, with a continuance, bring before your class, in order to make them as interesting as

possible, endeavour to vary your phraseology and illustrations. This will be a source of relief to your own mind, as well as a source of pleasure to them. But, after all, the great secret is, to take care that all you say proceeds from a warm and devout heart, and that it be accompanied by the gracious influences of the Spirit of God. You may give utterance to the same ideas, clothed in the same language, a thousand times, and yet what you thus deliver will always have a freshness and richness about it, so long as it flows from a feeling heart, and is attended with the unction of the Holy Ghost. What thus proceeds from you, will never grow stale, and will never weary those who listen to it. The Holy Spirit of God makes that which is old to appear new ; and gives to that which is of itself dull and unattractive, beauty, and vigour, and life. Recollect the language of the great apostle to the Gentiles, " To write the *same* things unto you to me is not grievous, but for you it is safe." Paul found it necessary to write the same things, and you will find it necessary to speak them, and for a reason similar to the one which influenced him, and that is, the safety of those committed to your care.

Furthermore, you will occasionally be tempted to think you *do no good*, and *that all your efforts are useless*. This temptation, perhaps, will not be uncommon, unless you have actual demonstration to the contrary. Of this, however, you cannot always come to a just conclusion. The amount of good which you do is in a great measure hidden from you. It is wisely ordered it should be so: but, doubtless, it is much more than you conceive it to be. But, apart from other considerations, let me ask, Is it nothing that you help to keep up the line of demarcation between the world and a number of good people, whom the Lord Jehovah has set apart for himself? Is it nothing that you go in and out before them, and conduct their devotional services? Is it nothing that you direct penitents, and comfort mourners, and strengthen the wavering, and encourage the faint-hearted, and edify believers, and give advice and counsel as they may be required? Is it nothing that you go after the lost, and drive back those who have strayed, and visit and sympathize with the sick? Is it nothing that you help the ministers of Jesus Christ, and co-operate with your brethren to promote the prosperity of Zion? And is it

nothing that you are agents in a movement which is exerting a greater moral influence in Christendom and the world, than any other in existence? Are these things nothing? You dare not affirm they are. The good, then, which you are the means of effecting, is, in the aggregate, great. It is direct and indirect, visible and invisible, temporal and spiritual, present, permanent, and eternal; you ought, therefore, to be encouraged to persevere, and to be "steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," in this department of his service, knowing "your labour is not," and cannot be, "in vain in the Lord." Do not forget, the amount of good which you may be the means of doing, is not the rule by which you ought to be governed. Success is cheering; but duty, not success, is the rule of action.

I observe, once more, you will have trials from without, as well as from within; in other words, from your members, as well as from yourself. Some of those over whom you are appointed to watch, will not, it is to be feared, always walk in accordance with their profession. And although they ought not, and need not, at any time to do otherwise;

yet, exposed to temptation, and subject to manifold infirmities, as they are, it will not be a matter of surprise if they do not. You will, perhaps, ever and anon, hear that some of them have been forming improper connexions with a view to matrimony, or that some of them have been attending improper places of amusement, or have been using improper language, or manifesting improper tempers, or contracting debts and getting embarrassed in their temporal circumstances ; but let the cases be what they may, if the honour of religion and the glory of Christ be involved, they will be a source of trouble to you. It cannot be otherwise. For, as you have “no greater joy” than when your members “walk in the truth,” so you will have proportionate sorrow when they depart from it. But, however painful it may be to you when any of your members err, or fall into sin, do not be cast down, but bear the burden for the sake of Christ and his church ; and, in every instance, look the evil in the face, and either remedy or remove it ; either rectify what is wrong in the offending parties, or, to prevent scandal, see that they have no longer a name and place among you.

In the discharge of your duties, you will sometimes give offence. If you are faithful, you will be sure to do this; and the thought of so doing will be a great cross to you. You will, no doubt, be disposed to shrink from doing what you ought, from the fear of offending; but never yield to the influence of fear. However difficult the task may be, and however flesh and blood may recoil, always be tenderly and affectionately faithful. Do your duty, if the sky fall. Choose the best time for administering reproof. Let it not, on every occasion, (even as it respects those who continue to meet with you,) be in the presence of the class; but rather let it be between you and the offending parties in private. Perhaps you will succeed better in this way in gaining them, than in any other; and this is the great object you will have in view. But there are some faults which, according to the apostolical injunction, must be reproved before all, that all may fear: judgment and discretion must guide you as it respects cases of this description.

Thus I have stated some of the difficulties with which, as a Leader, you will have to contend, and which you will have to surmount



thodist Connexion, so glorify God in your body and spirit, as to get your Lord and Master, in the day of his coming, to say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!"

Yours, &c.

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## LETTER VIII.

### ON THE ADVANTAGES AND DUTY OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—As it will be incumbent upon you, whenever you may have the opportunity, to endeavour to persuade those who are religiously disposed, to give themselves to the Lord, and then to the church by his will, it will be necessary for you to be versed in the subject of Christian communion, and to be prepared to assign reasons why they should practise it, and also to answer any objections which may be started. To be able to bring forward some powerful inducements which may tend to prevail upon persons to join the church of God, may be of

signal service. In many instances, it may prove the turning-point; and by the force of right reason and conclusive arguments, you will succeed in your object, and have your wishes realized. Qualify yourself, therefore, to win souls; for "he that winneth souls," whether it be by the public ministration of the gospel, or by private conference, "is wise."

The advantages of Christian communion are so numerous, so great, and so obvious, that you never need be afraid of stating them, and of boldly advocating and enforcing attention to them.

I shall briefly notice a few of them, as this may serve to assist you as circumstances may require. In doing this, I observe,

Christian communion is *a school of instruction*. Not, it is true, in points of law, nor in the profundities of philosophy; nor in the abstractions of metaphysics, nor in the controversies of theology; but in something higher and nobler and far superior to them all;—in the verities of experimental religion. I acknowledge, much respecting these may be learned from a truly evangelical and spiritual ministry; but a knowledge of religious expe-

rience in its minuter details and manifold ramifications, can be obtained only through the medium of the communion of saints. It is by associating with persons who have tasted "the wormwood and the gall" of sin ; who have felt the pains and throes and agonies of the new birth ; who have passed through the hour, and experienced the power, of temptation ; who have been brought out of darkness and bondage into the light and liberty of the children of God ; who have received answers to prayer, and realized the truth of the promises ; who enjoy communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, and who can rejoice in hope of a blessed immortality : I say, it is by associating in holy fellowship with persons like these, that they who are seeking the Lord are the most likely to obtain the information and guidance which they need, and to be instructed "in the deep things of God." Such persons can say to them, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the word of life : that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye

also may have fellowship with us." (1 John i. 1—3.) And doubtless many grope their way between light and darkness, truth and error, not unfrequently for a long period, because they form no visible union with them. God does not bless them as he otherwise would, because they refuse the instrumentality which he usually employs to do it; and the consequence is, they only see things, of infinite moment, as through a glass, darkly, when they might see them in the unclouded meridian light of the Holy Spirit of God.

Christian communion is also *a source of encouragement*. Encouragement is what all who are bound to the kingdom of heaven need. I admit, the discouragements which a man meets with in the practice of an irreligious life are great; yea, much greater than those he has to contend with when he resolves to devote himself to God. The dictates of his understanding, for instance, and the condemnatory power and stings of his conscience, and the secret whisperings and rebukes of the Holy Spirit, and the misgivings of his heart, on any sudden approach of danger, as if he should be brought to desolation in a moment; and the dread which he has of death, and the

fear which he has of judgment ; all discourage him from continuing as he is, an outcast from God and his church. And, on the other hand, numerous are the encouragements which he receives when he resolves to consecrate himself to the service of his Maker ; but from no source does he receive greater encouragement than from communion with the followers of Christ. There is not much less joy among the saints on earth, than there is among the angels in heaven, over “ a sinner ” when “ he repenteth,” and casts in his lot among them. They rejoice over him as if they had found great spoil ; and as it respects himself, he again and again proves the truth of that scripture, “ As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend.” And surrounded as he is by such a number of Christian companions, and cheered and animated as he is by their example, he feels he can bear up against all opposition ; and that he is prepared, not only to look his enemies in the face, but, if it be necessary, also “ to meet them in the gate.”

Christian communion is likewise *a fountain of strength*. It is a trite observation, but not the less true for being so, that “ union is

strength." Union with the people of God, for the purpose of holy converse, demonstrates that it is so. A person cannot properly cultivate fellowship "with the saints of the Most High," without being greatly strengthened thereby. By so doing, he not only gets his hands strengthened to maintain his ground against the common enemy; but he gets them strengthened for every good work. Whatever may be the nature of his mental conflicts, or his trials, or his necessities, while he is walking in the path of duty, from this source he gets assistance. By virtue of the spirit of communion, he obtains help which is of unspeakable value. If, for instance, he be cast down, by this he gets raised up; and if he be disconsolate, by this he receives comfort; and if he be weary and faint in his mind, by this he is revived and refreshed and prompted to duty; and if he be troubled with doubts and fears, by this they are chased away; and if he be contending with difficulties, by this he finds counsel and relief; and if he be suffering, here he meets with sympathy; and if he be the subject of rejoicing, here his joys are participated and shared. All true kindred Christian souls have com-

munion in each other's joys and sorrows. And being thus helped and strengthened under all circumstances, the man of God is enabled "to stand in the evil day, and after he has done all to stand."

Christian communion, moreover, is a great preservative from *the power of temptation*. The sources of temptation are numerous ; all men are, more or less, assailed by the world, the flesh, and the devil ; but a member of the church is in less danger from these than one who is not, because he has furnished himself with more powerful motives to resist and overcome them than the other has. The mind of a member of the church of God is surrounded with restraints and preservatives ; and when temptations are presented to it, let them come from what quarter they may, the thought that "I am a professor of religion ; I have decided for God ; I am a member of the visible church of Christ ; I have a consistency of character to maintain ; I must so act that the way of truth may not be evil spoken of ; I must bring no reproach upon the cause which I have espoused ; the eyes of many are upon me, and my tempers and disposition and conduct are continually being



watched :” I say, thoughts like these are like a strong tower to him, and he runs into it and is safe. A person who has visible union with religious people has these inducements to vigilance and circumspection and consistency, to which others are strangers ; and therefore, by neglecting to unite himself with some section of the Christian church, a man robs himself of many of those moral barriers against, and motives to resist, evil, which are necessary in a matter of so much moment as the everlasting salvation of his soul.

Christian communion, furthermore, is a source of *indescribable good*, inasmuch as they who practise it, and live in accordance with their profession, have an interest in the prayers of all who are like-minded with themselves. The members of the church of Christ consider themselves as one body, as members of the same family, as engaged in the same holy warfare, as subject to the same infirmities, as heirs together of the same life, and as bound to the same heaven of glory ; and hence they feel and pray for each other’s welfare. O how often do ministers of the gospel and the disciples of Christ pour out their souls for the well-being of all who name his

name ! How often both in public and in private do they say :—" Lord, bless thy people ! Let those ' who love thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.' Enable them to grow in grace. Strengthen them, that they may vanquish and overcome all their enemies. Lift up the hands which hang down, and confirm the feeble knees. Supply all their need, and bring them to thine eternal joy." Now, every member of the church, especially if he be a saved member, has an interest in these prayers, as well as the prayers of those with whom he meets for Christian conference. Numberless prayers are offered to heaven in his behalf. And if the fervent effectual prayer of one righteous man availeth much, the fervent effectual prayers of many righteous men must avail much more. . It cannot be but signal benefits should be conferred upon all who cultivate the communion of saints, in answer to the every-day, as well as occasional, prayers of some of the best people in the world. Blessings in showers descend and rest upon them as the result of the supplications of the church.

Christian communion, I observe once more,

is the source of *mutual benefit*. The truth of this is beautifully illustrated in what transpired between Moses and Hobab. When Hobab refused the invitation of Moses to accompany them through the wilderness, by saying, "I will not go ; but I will depart to mine own land, and to my kindred ; Moses said, Leave us not, I pray thee, forasmuch as thou knowest we have to encamp in the wilderness, and thou mayest be unto us instead of eyes. And it shall be, if thou go with us, yea, it shall be that what goodness the Lord shall do unto us, the same will be unto thee." There are many who, if they were united with the people of God, might be exceedingly useful. They have gifts or other qualifications which would enable them to be so. They might be unto others instead of eyes, or ears, or hands, or feet. They might, in many instances, be the source of guidance, or of wisdom, or of protection, or of support. And these are what all are bound to be who possess the requisite capabilities. And as the members of the church of God are engaged in diffusing light, in disseminating divine truth, in lessening the moral miseries of mankind, in contending against the forces and destroying

the kingdom of Satan, and in endeavouring to establish the kingdom of Christ as wide as the world,—they earnestly desire to get all the co-operation and assistance which they can possibly obtain; and it comes to pass that whatever good, whatever blessing, God bestows upon them while they are engaged in promoting his glory, all who co-operate and assist share in it, get “filled with the loving-kindness of the Lord.” Again, I remark,—

Christian communion is *an earnest or pledge of heaven*. The Lord Jesus Christ has only one church, although that is divided into two parts,—the church militant and the church triumphant; the one is on the earth, the other in the skies. They are separated from each other by “the narrow stream of death.” Now, having fellowship with the church militant, is an earnest or pledge of having fellowship with the church triumphant. All who enjoy this in the spirit of it, can sing,

“And if our fellowship below

In Jesus be so sweet;

What heights of rapture shall we know,

When round his throne we meet!”

It is rational to suppose that those who have

had communion with the church in its suffering state, will also have communion with it in its reigning state in glory everlasting. And how those persons who have had no connexion, no union, no fellowship with the church on earth, can expect to have these things in heaven, is what I cannot understand. All such expectations, when brought to the test of holy scripture, will be found as baseless as a vision.

Such are some of the advantages which are to be derived from Christian communion. I have stated them for your instruction and use. But, apart from the advantages which are to be derived from the practice, and of which every man who consults his own interest ought to avail himself; you may contend that visible union with some section of the church is a plain and paramount duty from other considerations. It is as much the duty of every man to be a visible member of some branch of the church of Christ, as it is for him to repent and believe the gospel. If there be a church on earth, and that church be of divine institution, (and I challenge all the men in the universe to prove the contrary,) then the case is clear and evident.

This is a duty which every man owes *to God* in his Triune character. He owes it to God the Father. He enjoins it; and without it his will cannot be done. He owes it to God the Son. No man can neglect to unite himself with the visible church, without neglecting to become a member of that body of which Christ is the Head; for he has declared himself to be the Head of his body, the church. And he owes it to God the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost guides those who are sincere into all truth; and every man who acts on the convictions planted in his heart by the Spirit of God, will be led into union with the disciples of the crucified Saviour of man.

This is a duty, also, which man owes *to himself*. Every man has a soul to save; he has pardon and holiness to acquire and retain; he has the evil tendencies of his nature to conquer, and self-denial to practise; he has to improve his gifts, and to increase his graces, and to be an example of good works; and he is bound to take those steps by which he will be the best enabled to do these things: and the experience of myriads for generations has demonstrated, that these things can be done in the most efficient manner in connexion with



holy fellowship with "the elect of God." "He that walketh with the wise," says Solomon, "shall be wise; while the companion of fools shall be destroyed."

This is likewise a duty which a man owes *to the church itself*. If visible union with the church be a duty, (and the Bible declares it to be so,) then church-membership is as much the duty of one man as of another, and equally the duty of all men. It therefore follows, that those persons whose eyes are enlightened, and who are desirous of doing the will of God, cannot do it without entering into covenant bonds with his people. They ought to be what the others are. The members of the church ought to have their presence, their sanction, their sympathies, their co-operation and support; and if there be any reproach to suffer, any persecution to endure, any sacrifices to make, any work to do, or any honours to divide, they ought to participate and share. The members of the church of Christ ought not to be left to stand alone by any who are in heart "on the Lord's side." All such persons ought to give them the right hand of fellowship, and to devote their gifts, and graces, and energies, and influence, and property, in



helping to "build the walls of Jerusalem," and to make her "the praise of the whole earth."

This, moreover, is a duty which a man owes *to the world* at large. Every man is expected to do all the good he can to the world as long as he continues in it. God blesses the world by the church; he has done so in all ages, and he does so still. The members of the church are "the light of the world," and they keep it from being involved in universal darkness; they are "the salt of the earth," and prevent it from becoming one unbroken mass of moral corruption and putridity; they are the representatives of the Lord Jehovah, and hinder the Prince of the power of the air from exercising a general and uncontrolled dominion over the children of men. It follows, therefore, the greater the number of persons there are joined in Christian fellowship, the more representatives the Lord Jehovah will have among mankind, the more light there will be in the world, and the more salt there will be in the earth. Hence, if a man wish to do his duty as a citizen, or as one of the species merely; if he wish to ameliorate the condition of his fellows; if he wish to bless the world by his influence, by his example, and by the consistency of his

character ; he must cultivate communion with some section of the church of Christ.

Having said thus much, I recommend you to converse with those persons whose attention you can engage respecting the advantages of Christian fellowship, and urge them to the practice of the duty. There is no subject on which the so-called Christian world needs light and information more than it does on this ; millions, judging from the course which they pursue, are infidels respecting it. Labour diligently and continually to make them otherwise.

You will, no doubt, meet with many who will start objections : inasmuch as numbers do all they can to excuse themselves from a plain and absolute duty, which is made binding on them by the great Head of the church. Be prepared to answer their objections, and to turn them out of their “refuge of lies.”

Some will state as an objection, that their parents, or their husbands, or other parties, are opposed to their being members of a religious society ; in other words, of a section of the Christian church. The objections of these, we mean of parents and husbands, &c., generally originate, either in prejudice, or in igno-

rance, or in wickedness. When prejudice is the cause, you must adopt some means to get it removed ; when it is ignorance, try to communicate correct information ; and when it is sin, they should be reasoned with and warned ; but, in all cases, whether it be of children or of wives who meet with opposition, the parties should be instructed to act on the convictions which they possess, as to what they believe to be the will of God concerning them. I would not for a moment attempt to undermine the legitimate authority, either of parents or husbands ; yet, when they invade the authority of Christ, and usurp the sacred rights of conscience, although they should be treated with uniform respect and kindness, they ought not to be listened to. God must be obeyed, whether parents and husbands and others are or not. "We ought," says St. Peter, "to obey God rather than men." (Acts v. 29.)

Others will state, they are afraid, if they do connect themselves with the church, they will not continue steadfast ; and they will assign this as a reason for not doing it. Question these persons as to the ground of their fears ; and convince them that thousands under the influence of similar fears have put their "hands

to the gospel plough and have never looked back," but have, to the end of life, "adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." Urge them at once to make the attempt to do likewise. Especially exhort them to act as they feel in conscience they are bound to do, and to leave the future to the wise Disposer of all events.

A third class, who deserve little attention, will object on the ground that there "are many ignorant persons who meet for Christian fellowship, and they are not likely to obtain much good by associating with them." Advise such, if they be really serious, to let those whom they suppose to be thus ignorant have the benefit of their superior knowledge and wisdom. Remind them it is written, "That he who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Teach them to beware, lest in the day of judgment they should be found in the same condemnation as the unprofitable servant, who hid his Lord's talent in a napkin, and who was bound hand and foot and cast into outer darkness. But, at the same time, do not forget to assure them, that many of those whom they suppose to be so

very ignorant are truly wise, having been made "wise to salvation through the faith which is in Christ Jesus;" and that it would be a privilege, and highly beneficial to them, to hold intercourse with them on matters connected with experimental religion.

A fourth class will object because "there are so many who practise Christian communion, who act inconsistently with their profession." Let these know, even admitting what they state to be true, that because others do not act in accordance with their profession, is not a sufficient reason why they should not make any profession at all; and that because others set a bad example, is no excuse for their not setting a good one. Ask them if every thing like piety, and holiness, and devotedness to God is to be banished out of the world; and if no more additions are to be made to the church because some persons in it do not walk worthy of their vocation? Convince them that they are as much bound to set an example of religious consistency, both to the church and the world, as others are; and that God expects this at their hands. Tell them what would be the answer of Christ to ob-

jectors on the ground of professional inconsistency: he would say unto all such, "What is that to thee, follow thou me."

A fifth class will object because they "are not convinced it is a duty." Tell those who say they are not convinced it is a duty, that by so saying they admit they are convinced, (although the Holy Ghost has declared to the contrary,) that righteousness can have fellowship with unrighteousness, and that light can have communion with darkness, and that Christ can have concord with Belial, and that a believer can have part with an infidel, and that the temple of the living God can have agreement with idols. (2 Cor. vi. 14—16.) Tell them, moreover, if they are not convinced of this, then they are not convinced that God has a visible church on the earth; not convinced they ought to come out of the world and to be separated; not convinced they ought to make a public profession of Christ before men; and that if they are not convinced of these things, they are not convinced of any truth in the Bible; neither would they be convinced, "although one rose from the dead."

The last class I shall mention, are those who will tell you they "can get to heaven



without it." Do not contradict them. But, if you admit what they affirm, let it only be on the ground that the Lord Jehovah, in infinite mercy, often pardons much ignorance and presumption. Do not, however, forget to maintain, that if they do get to heaven without it, they will not get there in the way it is the will of God they should ; and remind them it is written, " Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven : but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven ; " and that they are in danger, unless they do the will of God as it respects this, of hearing him say, " Depart from me, I never knew you." \*

\* The following extract from Mr. Wesley's " Plain Account of the People called Methodists," as it relates to objections to Christian communion, will be interesting to you. " Notwithstanding," says he, " all these advantages (of meeting in class), many were at first extremely averse to meeting thus. Some, viewing it in a wrong point of light, not as a privilege, (indeed an invaluable one,) but rather a restraint, disliked it on that account, because they did not like to be restrained in any thing. Some were ashamed to speak before company. Others honestly said, ' I do not know why, but I do not like it.'

" Another objection was, ' There is no scripture for



I have thus furnished you, briefly, with a little assistance in your efforts to bring others into the church. This, I have no doubt, is what you will endeavour to do ; for, as one has justly observed, “The spirit of communion is aggregative of like parts to herself, for the filling up and strengthening of communion : she is still aiming at the body’s increase ; and, therefore, as the waters of the sea win upon the banks, so doth this spirit of communion

this,’ (for classes,) and I know not what. I answer, 1. There is no scripture against it. You cannot show one text that forbids them. 2. There is much scripture for it, even all those texts which enjoin the substance of those various duties whereof this is only an indifferent circumstance, to be determined by reason and experience. 3. You seem not to have observed, that the scripture, in most points, gives only general rules, and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind.

“ ‘But these,’ said another, ‘are all man’s inventions.’ This is but the same objection in another form ; and the same answer will suffice for any reasonable person. These are man’s inventions. And what then ? That is, they are methods which men have found, by reason and common sense, for the more effectually applying several scripture rules, couched in general terms, to particular occasions.”—WESLEY’S Works, vol. viii. 3d ed. 8vo. pp. 254, 255.

seek out and enlarge her borders. She is like to Dan, whose border was too narrow; she gains still: as a conquering army hath town after town falling to it, so this spirit, both in the ministry of it and in the other members, endeavours after the winning more and more to become her brethren, her citizens, her friends. No body hath such a faculty as this for the strengthening of herself, for number, for assistance, both in gifts and graces, as this hath. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of this communion, spent his life in gathering members to this body. Peter gathered three thousand at once; and each member of it doth, or ought to, become all in all to gain some. The angels rejoice in it; the blessed saints do long for the perfect collection of all the members into one; and there is no truly born son of God, but seeks to get as many as he can out of the world into this fellowship, mourning to see what an huge body the malignant church is to the militant." \*

Yours, &c.

\* A Practical Catechism: or, a View of those Principal Truths which are contained in the Catechism. By D. R(ogers), B. of Div. 4to. 1632, part ii. p. 190.

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